DECEMBER
30th
1922
25c

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Adventure

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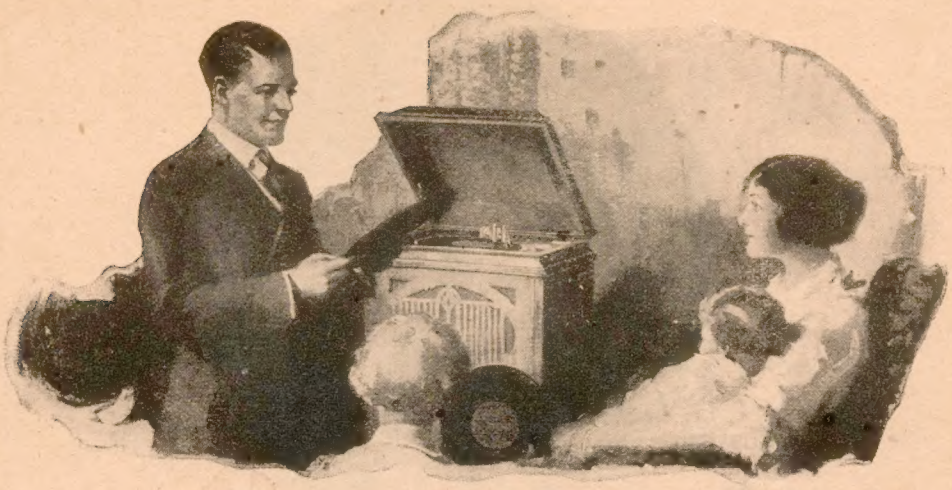
Persons residing in Canada should send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada.

ADVENTURE
Dec. 30th, 1922

Published three times a month by The Ridgway Company at Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York City. Yearly subscription $6.00 in advance; single copy 25 cents. Entered as second-class matter Oct. 1, 1910, at the post-office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879.



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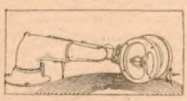
Because It Plays All Records

It Brings All Artists, All Music, Into the Home

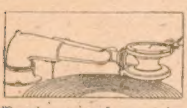
When you choose a Brunswick, you invite all the world's music into your home. *All* the great artists, orchestras, and stars of the concert and operatic stages.

The Remarkable Brunswick Ultona which plays all makes of Records

A turn of the hand—that's all



Shows Ultona playing any record, using steel or fibre needle.



To play record requiring diamond point, you simply turn the Ultona to this position.

For The Brunswick plays all makes of records at a turn of the hand. No "attachments," no bother.

To any person purchasing a phonograph, this is most important.

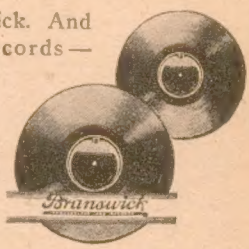
New artists and new music are appearing every day. Different artists record for different makes of records. And The Brunswick plays them all. Plays them as they should be played.

An Exclusive Brunswick Feature

The Ultona—the all record player—is a part of The Brunswick. It is designed to play any and every make of record correctly—to bring out the true musical value of the composition. It is not a "make-shift," but is built in The Brunswick. (See illustration.)

But that, of course, is but one advantage of The Brunswick. For Brunswick is known, internationally, in high musical circles, as the instrument chosen by foremost educators, critics and musicians for their own homes. It has brought phonographic music into the realms of higher musical expression.

Hear The Brunswick. And hear Brunswick Records—*the world's clearest phonograph records.* A demonstration, which will be given gladly by any Brunswick dealer, will amaze you.



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The kind of a fellow who gets ahead today—and holds one of these high positions is the fellow with *training*. Nowadays employers can find men with training very easily—because colleges are graduating them pretty fast—so the fellow who had to leave school early is handicapped unless he gets training during his idle hours.

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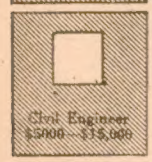

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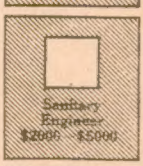
It is easy to get, if you go about it in the right way. You have often heard of others who doubled and trebled their salaries in a year's time. You wondered how they did it. Was it a pull? Don't you think it. When a man is hired he gets paid for exactly what he does, there is no sentiment in business. It's preparing for the future and knowing what to do at the right time that doubles and trebles salaries.



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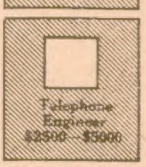
Why don't you see what an American School course will do for you? Our experience in helping thousands of others will surely help you get to the top. If you really want to get ahead, get busy and—



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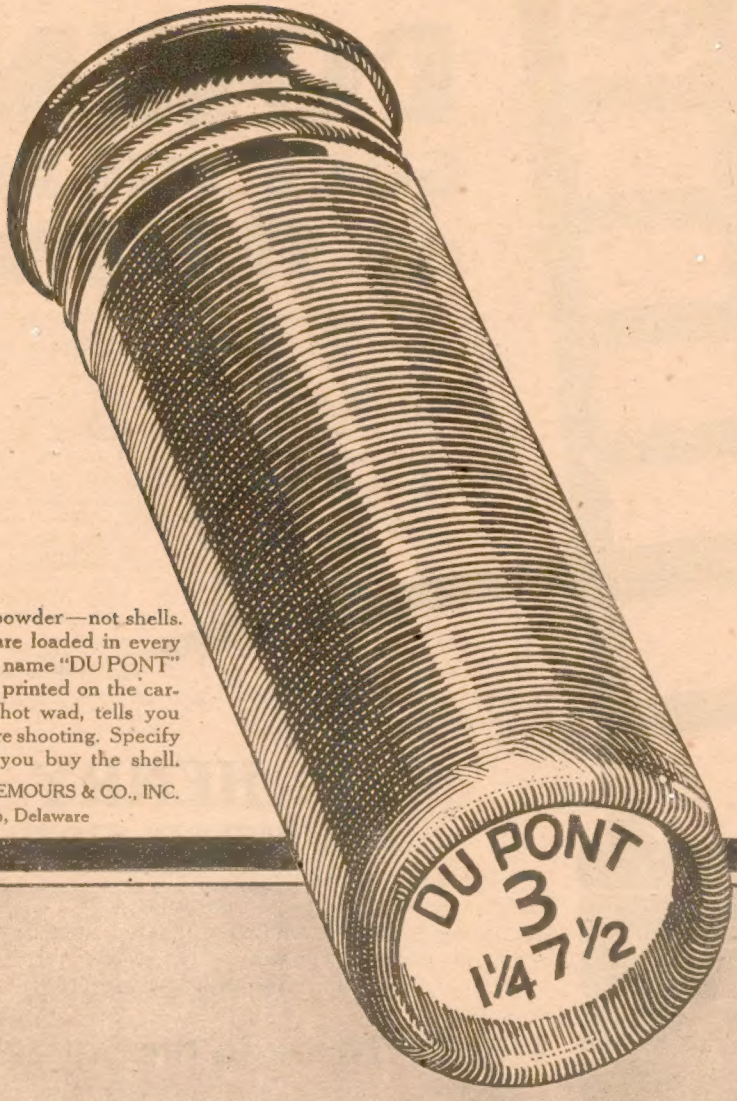
These are just a few of the authors whose stories appear in

DECEMBER

Everybody's Magazine

FIRST IN FICTION ON EVERY NEWS-STAND



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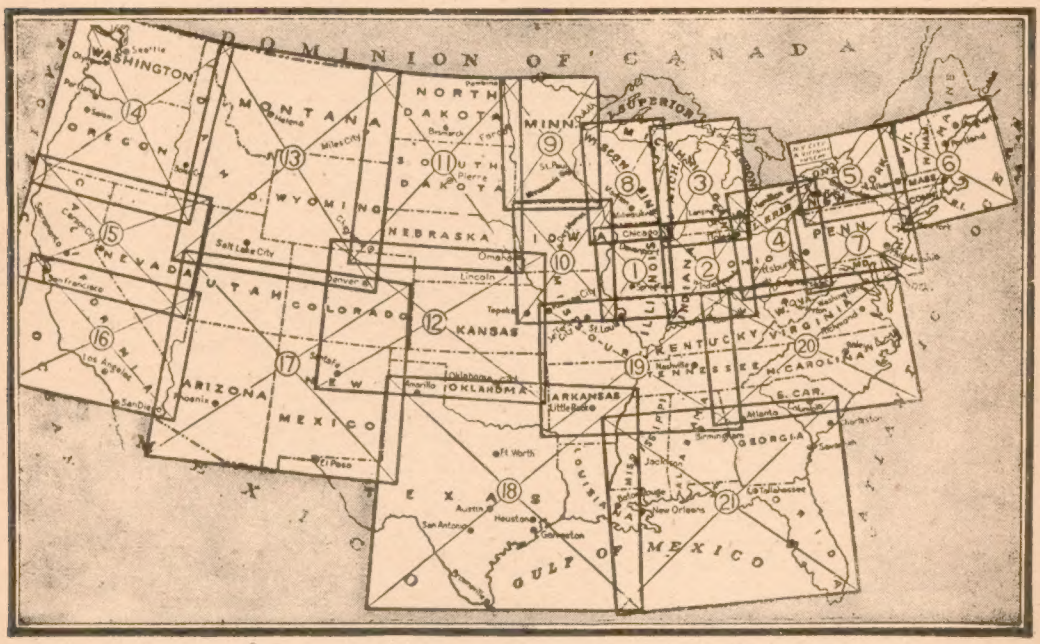

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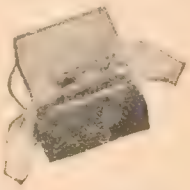

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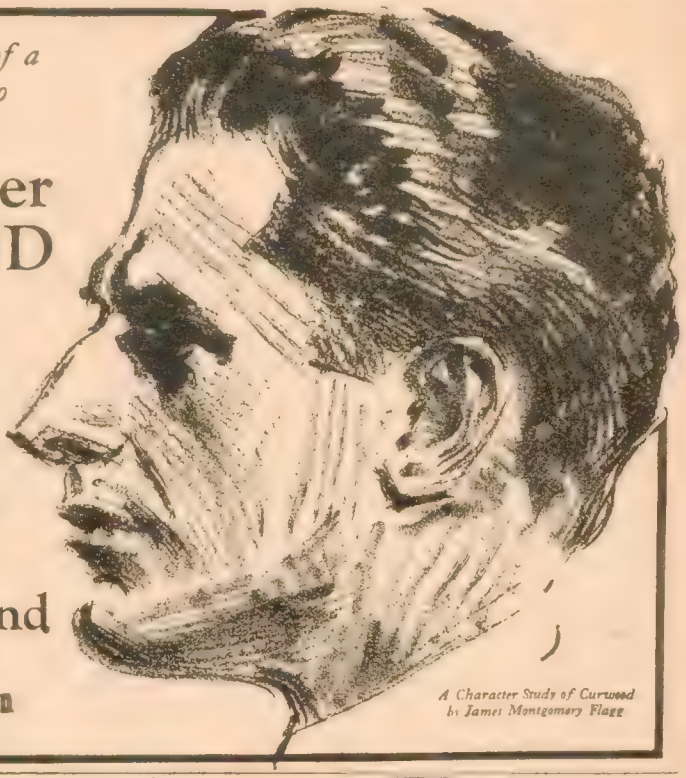

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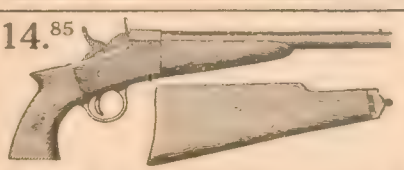

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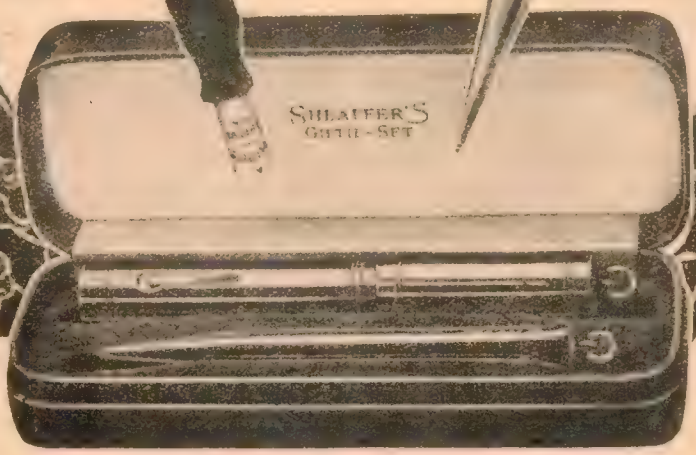

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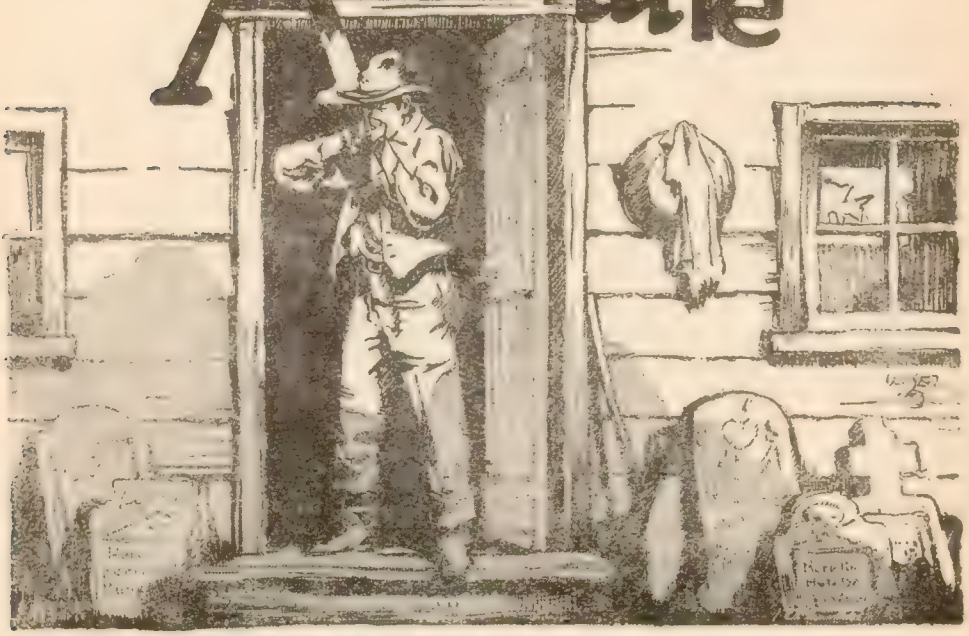
Statement of the ownership, management, circulation, etc., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, of *Adventure*, published three times a month at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1922. State of New York, County of New York, *ss.* Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared JAMES F. BIRMINGHAM, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the business manager of the *Adventure* and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 443, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit: 1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher: THE RIDGWAY COMPANY, a corporation, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City. Editor, ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, 223 Spring Street, New York City. Managing Editor, none. Business Manager, JAMES F. BIRMINGHAM, 223 Spring Street, New York City. 2. That the owners are: (Give names and addresses of individual owners, or, if a corporation, give its name and the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding 1 per cent. or more of the total amount of stock.) *Owner:* THE RIDGWAY COMPANY, a corporation, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City. *Stockholders:* FEDERAL PUBLISHING COMPANY, a corporation, 15 Exchange Place, Jersey City, N. J.: stockholder of FEDERAL PUBLISHING COMPANY: THE BUTTERICK COMPANY, a corporation, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City; stockholders of BUTTERICK COMPANY: GEORGE B. BLACK, 812 Lincoln Avenue, Mendota, Ill; C. D. BARNEY & Co., 15 Broad Street, New York City; JOHN M. DONINGTON, 37 Wall Street, New York City; CHARLES A. EDWARDS, 45 Wall Street, New York City; W. H. GELSHENEN, 100 William Street, New York City; S. R. LATSHAW, Butterick Building, New York City; J. E. OLIPHANT & Co., 61 Broadway, New York City; LAURA J. O'LOUGHLIN, 514 West 114th Street, New York City; MRS. ARETHUSA POND, 830 S. South Vermont Avenue, Los Angeles, Calif.; ANNA L. WILSON, 70 Park Street, New York City; B. F. WILDER, Butterick Building, New York City; C. D. WILDER, Butterick Building, New York City; G. W. WILDER, Butterick Building, New York City. 3. *That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent. or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are:* (*If there are none, so state.*) None. 4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him. 5. That the average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the six months preceding the date shown above is (This information is required from daily publications only.) JAMES F. BIRMINGHAM, Business Manager. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 30th day of September, 1922. CECIL L. WAHL, Notary Public, Kings County, certificate filed New York County. (*My commission expires March* 30, 1924.) (SEAL.) Form 3526.—Ed. 1916.

Dec. 30. 1922 Adventure Vol. 38 No. 3



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Author of "The Range Boomer," "Flames of the Storm," etc.

TWO men swung their horses through the tumble-down gateway of the Half-Moon Ranch and rode slowly toward the old, rambling ranch-house.

The man in the lead was a tall, thin, unshaven cowboy, with a long, sad countenance and a pair of bright, grin-wrinkled eyes. He rode standing straight in his saddle, with the brim of his sombrero pulled down over his eyes.

The other man was shorter, heavier, with a heavy-lined face and half-shut eyes. A few strands of roan-colored hair straggled from under the brim of his hat, which rested on the back of his head.

They drew rein and looked the place over. The tall one nodded toward the side of the house, and they both rode around to the rear, from whence came the sound of a voice raised in anger.

"Cook!" exclaimed the voice scornfully. "You? Huh! Do yuh think the Half-Moon outfit wear steel bills and digests their food through a gizzard? Why, dang yore hide, yuh can't even burn stuff decently. Set yoreself up to cook fer an outfit, do yuh? Where'd you learn to cook? Cook, ——! Yo're fired! No, I don't want to hear yuh explain how yuh got drunk on one li'l drink and forgot which way home was. No sir! Pack yore warbag and drift. I've got enough troubles without annexin' a lot of bad stummicks

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around here. Yo're fired; *sabe?* If you can't understand English, I'll write it out in Swedish and mail it to yuh."

The tall cowboy's face wrinkled into a grin, and he started to say something to his companion, but just at that moment a woman opened the kitchen-door and looked out at them.

She was a tiny wisp of a woman, dressed in faded calico. About fifty years of age, with a mild, sweet face and soft, blue eyes. She stared at the two cowboys for a moment, and a flush crept into her tanned face.

"Ma'am," said the tall cowboy taking off his hat, "I plumb betcha that cook knows where to head in at about now."

"Did—did you hear—me?" she faltered.

"Yes'm. I'm 'Hashknife' Hartley and my pardner's name is 'Sleepy' Stevens. Nod to the lady, Sleepy."

"I am Mrs. Snow," said the lady. "'Frosty' Snow is my husband. He owns this Half-Moon Ranch."

"T' meetcha," bowed Hashknife, and then seriously, "Ma'am, if that cook ain't took the hint yet, I'd admire to repeat yore words to him."

"The—there ain't no cook here now," confessed Mrs. Snow.

"Ain't? Why——"

"He won't quit, don'tcha see? His name's 'Swede Sam,' and if —— ever made a more ignorant person than Swede Sam he sure kept him under cover for loco-seed."

"Didja ever try firin' him?" asked Hashknife.

"Sure. But he won't quit. Every day I practise on a new style of firin' him. And what you just heard was what I'm framing up to tell him when he shows up again. We've done everythin' except kill him outright, but he just grins and says:

"'Das goot yoke. Ay am de cook, you bet.'"

Hashknife laughed joyfully. He liked Mrs. Snow because she could see the humor of life.

"Where is he now?" asked Sleepy.

Mrs. Snow shook her head slowly.

"I dunno: A few weeks ago he cooked up a big mess of prunes and forgot where he put 'em. Yesterday he drank the result, and lit out for Caldwell; singin' somethin' that didn't sound like a Swedish church-hymn. I reckon he's asleep in Casey McGill's saloon now. He thinks Casey's a Swede."

"Much stock runnin' in this Lodge-Pole country, ma'am?" asked the practical Sleepy.

"Ye-e-es—I reckon you'd say there was."

"We're lookin' for jobs, ma'am," explained Hashknife. "Me and Sleepy are what you'd call top-hands."

"Never seen a puncher that wasn't," declared Mrs. Snow. "Frosty says there's been a epidemic in the cow-country, which has made top-hands out of every danged buckaroo what has two legs to wear chaps."

"They do get graduated fast, I reckon," agreed Hashknife grinning. "Me and Sleepy earned ours. Do we get the job?"

Mrs. Snow smiled and shook her head. She liked the looks of these two bronzed, practical-looking men, but the Half-Moon was full handed.

"We're runnin' full of help, boys. Frosty said he'd likely have to cut down pretty soon."

"Well, that's too danged bad," observed Hashknife. "I'd sure like to work for you, ma'am. Know any ranch that might be honin' for two more to feed?"

Mrs. Snow smiled and shook her head, but sobered as she squinted at them.

"Might try the Tombstone Ranch."

"Sounds right cheerful, ma'am," observed Hashknife. "Do they raise 'em already carved?"

"Kinda," admitted Mrs. Snow seriously. "Place belongs to old Amos Skelton, the meanest old son-of-a-gun that ever pulled on a boot. Everybody hates him."

"Must amount to somethin' then," observed Sleepy.

"What does his iron look like—his brand?" asked Hashknife, reaching for the cigaret makings.

"It's the old 33 outfit. Folks named it the Tombstone about a year ago. Bill Wheeler owned the old 33 and he let Caldwell put their graveyard on his ranch. It was a kinda nice spot, where the grass stays green most of the time. Then old Amos comes along and buys Bill out. Amos is a danged old blow-hard and most everybody starts in hatin' him at the drop of a hat.

"Long comes Halloween Eve and some brainless cowpunchers goes down to the graveyard, swipes the tombstones, and when old Amos wakes up the next mornin' his front yard is set full of them epi-tafts.

"It was a good joke on Amos, don't you think?"

"Did he laugh?" queried Hashknife.

"Not so's you could notice it," smiled Mrs. Snow. "He took a plow and harrer up to the graveyard, and when he got through cultivatin' it would take a higher power than exists in the Lodge-Pole country to tell where all them tombstones belonged. Yessir, he sure did remove all the brands. Them tombstones are all in his front yard yet, and I reckon they'll stay."

Hashknife and Sleepy laughed immoderately. Mrs. Snow looked severe for a moment, but joined in the laugh.

"Any punchers workin' for that outfit?" asked Hashknife, still laughing.

"One—'Quinin' Quinn."

"Why for the medicine cognomen?" asked Hashknife.

"Bitter. Quinn ain't smiled since he was born. Fact. Ain't got no grin-wrinkles on his face—not one. Nobody plays poker with him, 'cause of his face. Him and old Amos makes a good pair—to let alone."

"Well, we're sure much obliged to you, Mrs. Snow," said Hashknife. "We'll mosey along to Caldwell, I reckon. If you can't make your cook understand anythin', send for me. I sure *sabe* one word he'll jump for."

"Tell it to me, will you?"

"*Skoal.*"

"Shucks!" Mrs. Snow laughed shortly. "I *sabe* that one. It's like sayin', 'Here's my regards.' "

"Yeah, that's true," admitted Hashknife solemnly. "But yuh might yelp it just before you hit him with the ax."

They turned their horses and rode back around the house, heading toward Caldwell.

AHEAD of them the dusty road circled through the hills, as though following the lines of least resistance. There was little flat land in the Lodge-Pole range, but it was ideal for cattle; the breaks giving protection for feed in Summer and for stock in Winter. Cottonwood grew in abundance along the streams, and every cañon seemed heavily stocked with willow. The hills were scored with stock-trails, leading from water to the higher ground.

"Don't like this country," declared Sleepy after they had ridden away from the Half-Moon, "too many places to shoot from cover."

"Sleepy, you ought to have been an undertaker," said Hashknife. "Death sure does have a attraction for you, cowboy. To me this looks like a land of milk and honey."

"Milk and honey, like ——! More like strong liquor and hornets."

Hashknife laughed. He and Sleepy argued continually, swore affectionately at each other and shared the blanket of a cowboy's joys and woes.

"Look at the doughnut," grinned Hashknife. "Consider the rim of brown dough instead of lookin' through the hole all the time. Nothin' ever looks right to you, Sleepy."

"I said 'strong liquor'," declared Sleepy, leaning forward in his saddle, "and here comes the proof."

A horse and rider had topped a rise just beyond them, and there was no doubt but what the rider was sitting drunkenly in his saddle. The horse was going slowly, and in anything but a straight line, as if trying to balance its rider.

"Drunker 'n seven hundred dollars," declared Sleepy. "Ho-old fast!" he grunted, as the rider almost toppled from the saddle.

The horse stopped as they rode up, standing at right angles to the road, snuffing at the dust. The rider swayed sidewise and Hashknife grabbed him by the arm.

"Drunk ——!" snorted Hashknife. "This man's been shot!"

"My Gawd, yes!" gasped Sleepy, dismounting and going around to the other side.

"More 'n once, too," declared Hashknife, "or he's smeared himself with the blood."

They took the man off his horse and laid him beside the road. His flannel shirt was soaked with blood, and an examination showed that the man had been shot twice. One bullet had struck him high up in the left shoulder, while the other had torn its way through his body on the right side, about midway between shoulder and waist.

He was unconscious from loss of blood and his breath came jerkily.

"There ain't a danged thing we can do for him," said Hashknife, getting to his feet. "Looks to me like he'd been hit with a thirty-thirty."

Sleepy nodded as he looked up from an examination of the man's face.

"Betcha forty dollars that this here is Quinin Quinn. Didja ever see such a sour face in your life?"

" 'F you got two thirty-thirties through your carcass, I reckon you'd kinda sour, too," retorted Hashknife. " 'F we knowed where the Tombstone Ranch was, we'd take him there."

"Must be between here and Caldwell. This feller likely headed f'r home and missed the gate. If we don't find the ranch, I reckon we can find the town."

'And that," said Sleepy, as they draped the pan over his saddle, "is the first danged thing I ever suggested that you didn't argue about, Hashknife."

"First time you ever spoke sense, Sleepy."

"Glad you give me credit f'r this once."

"I'll give you credit, when you got it comin'. Get your lariat, Sleepy. We've got to tie this jigger kinda tight."

Sleepy got his rope and proceeded to tie his end of the man to the saddle.

"Lot's'a times I never get no credit," grunted Sleepy. "Lots'a times you takes all the credit."

"Givin' you credit now, ain't I, Sleepy?"

"Yeah—this time—I could tell you a lot of times——"

"Shall we set down and argue and let this man die, or would you rather shut your face and give him a chance?"

"Who's arguin'?" demanded Sleepy, swinging into his saddle.

" 'F I ever open my mouth——"

"You expose your ignorance," finished Hashknife. "Ride on the other side and see that he don't slip loose."

"Yeah, I'll do that, too," agreed Sleepy, suiting his action to the word. "But," he added, looking across the body of the wounded man, "don't think you've got all the brains, Hashknife—nor a big part of 'em. I never did see a tall man what had any too much *sabe*. Cæsar was a short man, and Napoleon was small and——"

"And look what happened to Napoleon," grinned Hashknife. "They pastured him on an island all alone."

"How about Cæsar, eh?"

"I dunno a —— thing about him," admitted Hashknife. "What happened to him, Sleepy?"

"I dunno f'r sure, but—betcha forty dollars that's the Tombstone Ranch."

THEY rode around the point of a hill and below them was a ranch-house, sprawled in a clump of cottonwoods. A long feed-shed, its roof twisted out of a straight line, stretched from a series of pole corrals along the bank of a willow-grown stream.

A thin streamer of smoke was drifting from the crooked stove-pipe. Between the gate and the ranch-house the ground was dotted with white slabs, seemingly laid out in orderly rows.

"That's her," agreed Hashknife. "Graveyard and all."

They rode down to the gate and up past the graveyard to the front door. There was no sign of an inhabitant, until Hashknife dismounted and started for the door, when the door was suddenly flung open and Hashknife faced the muzzle of a double-barreled shotgun. The man behind the gun was as gray as a rabbit, slightly stooped and with a face as hard as chiseled granite.

"Hook your feet to the dirt and keep your hands above your waist!" he growled.

Then he saw Sleepy.

He peered closer and the muzzle of the shotgun came down.

"Your name Stevens?" he asked.

"Hey!" gasped Sleepy. "You're 'Bliz' Skelton! Well, you danged pelican! Whatcha know about that?"

Sleepy fairly fell off his horse and bow-legged his way up to the door, where he and Skelton shook hands.

"This is Hashknife Hartly, my pardner, Bliz."

"Ex-cuse m' scatter-gun," said Skelton, as he shook hands with Hashknife.

"Danged old dodo!" Sleepy grinned widely. "Ain't seen you since you owned the O-Bar-O in Eagle River. You ain't changed much, 'cept to get homelier 'n ——. Mrs. Snow said that Amos Skelton owned this ranch. Never heard nobody call yuh anythin' but Blizzard."

"Christened Amos," grunted Skelton, squinting out at the horses.

"Plumb forgot the wounded man!" grunted Hashknife, leading the way out.

"——!" gaped Skelton. "That's Quinin! He's my hired man. What happened to him, anyway?"

Sleepy and Hashknife unfastened the ropes, while they told Skelton of how they had found Quinin. The old man's face grew tense and he spat viciously, but said

nothing. They carried Quinin into the house and placed him on a bed. Hashknife took hold of a limp wrist and squinted down at the man. Then he took a tiny mirror from his vest pocket and held it to the man's lips. The surface remaind unclouded.

Hashknife slowly replaced the mirror and looked at Skelton.

"He was your hired man—not is, Skelton."

"Dead?"

Hashknife nodded and reached for the "makings."

"Got any idea who threw the lead?" he asked.

Skelton shook his head.

"Trouble hunter, Bliz?" asked Sleepy.

"No!" Emphatically. "Quinin minded his own business."

Hashknife lighted his cigaret and looked around the room. It contained a box-stove, a table, littered with cigaret papers, two bunks and a few chairs.

"Me and Quinin lived in here," said Skelton. "Built our bunks in here so there'd only be one room to clean."

"What's the trouble around here?" asked Hashknife suddenly.

Skelton stared at him.

"What trouble?"

"Folks don't like you, Skelton. Feller don't get disliked for nothin'. Either you're wrong, or folks see things wrong. Me and Sleepy are danged good listeners."

"That's a fact, Bliz," nodded Sleepy.

"I'm —— if I know," admitted Skelton. "I've had this ranch about a year and a half and I ain't made a cent—nor a friend."

"Mebbe they're sore about the graveyard," said Sleepy.

"I don't blame 'em," agreed Skelton. "It was a dirty trick, but I didn't have a thing to do with it."

"You plowed out the grave-mounds," reminded Hashknife.

"I did, like ——!" snapped Skelton. "I tell you I'm gittin' tired of denyin' that charge."

"Oh!" grunted Hashknife softly.

"I left them tombstones where somebody planted 'em; but I sure didn't smooth out them mounds, y'betcha. I'm wonderin' that somebody ain't killed me over it, 'cause it's sure a killin' matter to obliterate ancestors thataway."

"'S a wonder yuh never sold out," grunted Sleepy.

"Been asked to." Skelton grinned for the first time. "Yes sir, it has been hinted at considerable."

"You're bull-headed, Bliz," grinned Sleepy. "I'd sure as —— sell out if I was you."

"Yeah? Mebbe you would, Sleepy—I dunno. They laid that tombstone job on to me, and everybody hates me fer it; and m' cattle disappears reg'lar-like, and once in a while somebody takes a whang at me with a rifle. But outside of that——"

Skelton spat and shook his head.

"What price do you hold on the ranch?" asked Hashknife.

"One hundred thousand dollars."

"Oh ——!" gasped Hashknife weakly. "You're old enough to know better than that, Skelton."

Skelton nodded seriously and scratched the palms of his hands on his hips.

"Age don't cut no ice, Hartley. This danged ranch ain't worth more 'n eight, nine thousand, with them tombstones throwed in to boot; but I'm —— if anybody's goin' to run Bliz Skelton off the place! I ain't the runnin' kind, y'betcha. And as long as I've got a shell left for that old sawed-off shotgun, I ain't goin' t' run; *sabe?*"

"Tha's all right," mumbled Hashknife. "You know your own capacity. What'll we do with the dead man?"

"Take him to Caldwell, I reckon. I'll hitch up to the wagon. I suppose Jake Blue and Doc. Clevis'll have a —— of a lot of questions to ask now."

"Who're they?" asked Sleepy.

"Sheriff and coroner."

Skelton stopped in the doorway and looked back.

"I'm —— glad yuh came along when you did. 'F I had to take him in alone I'd sure be stackin' m'self agin' a lot of misery."

"I betcha," nodded Hashknife. "As it is, we'll split the misery three ways."

"TAKES somethin' powerful to stir me in this —— heat; but right now I grows excited."

"Pinch" Johnson leaned back against the doorway of Barney Stout's blacksmith-shop and spat explosively. Barney lifted a perspiring face and ceased rasping on the hoof of a piebald bronco. His rasp fell to the floor with a clatter, and he came to the doorway, rubbing his horny hands on his leather apron.

"Ol' Amos bringin' comp'ny to town," grunted Pinch.

"One's that Half-Moon Swede," observed Barney, "and he's drunker 'n —— yet. Started out to walk to the ranch, and he was takin' up both sides and the middle of the road."

"And them ain't all!" grunted Pinch, getting to his feet.

"They's a pair of boots stickin' out the end of that wagon, Barney!"

Skelton drove up in front of Shipman's general store and tied his team to a porch-post. Several men crossed from the War Bonnet saloon, and one of them was Jake Blue, the sheriff—a skinny, blear-eyed personage, of much self-importance and undoubted ability with a gun.

"Looks t'me like somebody done got hurt," observed Pinch wisely.

He crossed the street with Barney hurrying along behind him.

The sheriff and the other men looked over the sides of the wagon-box curiously.

"What'samatter?" asked Blue. "Drunk?"

"Dead," said Hashknife.

"Zasso?" Mr. Blue had a habit of speaking a whole sentence as if it were only a single word.

He moved to the end-gate of the wagon and looked at the body from that angle.

"Howdedie?"

"Quiet-like," said Hashknife, manufacturing a cigaret.

"Huh!"

Mr. Blue seemed to discover Hashknife for the first time. He masticated his tobacco rapidly and glanced at Skelton.

"Howaboutcha?"

Skelton told in a few words, while more folks came and looked at the dead man.

"Where'd you come from?" asked the sheriff, looking at Hashknife."

"Recently?"

"Yeah."

"Tombstone ranch."

"I mean—before that."

Hashknife snapped his cigaret away and leaned back in his saddle.

"I was borned in Pecos, Texas, about thirty-two years ago——"

"What in —— do I care about that?" snapped Blue.

Hashknife looked surprized at the interruption.

"Pardner, you asked where I came from, didn't you? I'm tryin' to tell you."

"Zasso? Well, we'll let that slide fer now while we talks about other things. Will somebody find Doc Clevis?"

A man from the War Bonnet signified his willingness to find the doctor, while the crowd waited and grew to greater proportions.

Doc Clevis was easy to find, and a few minutes later he arrived on the scene, bustling with importance. He was over six feet tall, dressed in a loose-fitting, rusty-black suit and short boots. A thin fringe of hair circled his otherwise bald head and surmounted a face which was a mixture of unutterable sadness and no little evil.

He climbed into the wagon and sat humped on the edge of the wagon-box, while he examined the body. Finally he nodded sadly and looked at the circle of onlookers.

'He's dead," he announced solemnly.

"My ——!" marveled Hashknife. "You're a wonder, Doc."

"Been dead quite a while," said the doctor.

"Wonders'll never cease," grinned Hashknife.

Doc Clevis squinted at him, as if wondering if this tall cowboy was in earnest or not.

"Where does the Swede figure into this?" asked Pinch.

"We found him settin' beside the road," explained Skelton. "He's too drunk to know anythin'."

"Lemme look at that rifle," ordered the sheriff.

Sleepy handed down the rifle, and the crowd moved in to look at it. The sheriff levered out three cartridges and slipped a white cigaret-paper into the breech.

"Been shot lately," he announced, peering down the barrel.

"It was beside the road," said Skelton.

"Yeah?"

The sheriff looked quizzically at Skelton. "You found the Swede beside the road, too? 'Pears to me that you found a lot of things beside the road. Was the rifle near the Swede?"

"'Bout six feet from him."

"How far from the Swede did yuh find Quinin Quinn?"

"'Bout two miles."

"That don't mean nothin'," said Barney Stout. "Quinin was still pluggin' along when they found him. Anyway, that Swede never shot him."

"Zasso?"

Mr. Blue fastened his watery eyes upon Barney and lifted his sparse eyebrows.

"Mebbe you know who shot him," he said.

"Well," faltered Barney, "I dunno who shot him, but that —— Half-Moon cook was so drunk——"

"Yo're excused!" snapped Blue, and then to Skelton:

"This here is goin' t' need investigatin', Skelton. I dunno anythin' about these two strangers who horns in on this deal—do you?"

"This'n," nodded Skelton, indicating Sleepy. "I've knowed Sleepy Stevens f'r a long time; and when he takes a pardner, I kinda backs this here pardner. Know what I mean, Blue?"

"Gotcha. What do you make of it, Doc?"

"He was shot twice, and he's dead," replied Doc. "I ain't advancin' any theory who done it, sheriff."

"It's a —— good thing we called yuh, Doc," said Hashknife seriously. "I used to live in a place where we didn't have no doctor, and it sure was ——. Why, I've knowed times when we kept dead men propped up around town for weeks—waitin' to be sure they were dead. Lookin' back at them days, I'm wonderin' what killed 'em. Mebbe they was shot—I dunno."

"Are you plumb ignorant, or jist actin' smart?" asked the sheriff.

"That," said Hashknife seriously, "that is the secret of my success. Nobody ever found out, and I couldn't tell 'em, 'cause I didn't know m'self."

"Thasso?"

The sheriff's jaw muscles bulged, like twin walnuts, and he hooked his thumbs into the waist-band of his overalls, as he squinted at Hashknife's serious face.

"You came to a —— good place for to be found out."

"Well, that's right nice of you, sheriff. What do you reckon I ought to do for the information—kiss you?"

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" roared Pinch Johnson. "I'd admire to see you do it, stranger."

Mr. Blue's face did not belie his name, except that it went purple from the added flood of red. He opened his mouth, as though a ready retort burned his tongue, then he shut his jaws tightly and turned to the doctor—

"When'll you hold a inquest, Doc?"

"T'morrow, I reckon," said the doctor, rubbing his bald head with a rotary motion, as if polishing it. "Take that long to git evidence, won't it?"

Blue nodded and turned to Hashknife—

"You two fellers ain't aimin' to pull out soon, are you?"

Hashknife shook his head.

"No-o-o. We're plumb stuck on your town."

Blue grunted his unbelief. He might be ignorant, but not a fool.

"You ain't got no puncher now, have you, Skelton?"

Skelton shook his head.

"Ain't a lot of extra hands around this country," observed Blue. "Well, Doc, I reckon we better have Quinin moved into your place. Mind haulin' him down there, Skelton?"

Skelton did not mind. He turned his team around and headed for the doctor's office, with several men following. Hashknife and Sleepy rode across to a hitch-rack, tied their horses, and went into the War-Bonnet.

THE War-Bonnet was a large place for a town the size of Caldwell, but it looked prosperous. There was not much activity during the day, so the place was nearly deserted when Hashknife and Sleepy came in.

A couple of girls were on the small stage-like platform at the end of the room, practising a few dance steps, while with one hand a pallid young man thumped out a melody on the piano.

A bartender humped his white-clad elbows on the bar, while he deeply perused a paper-backed novel. A "swamper" was scrubbing back of the bar. His activities seemed to irritate the bartender, who knew that sooner or later he would have to move and break the thread of his story.

Hashknife and Sleepy walked up to the bar and looked around the place. The bartender sighed, folded over a leaf of his book to mark his place, and came down to them.

" 'Smatter over there?" he indicated the street with a jerk of his sleek-combed head.

"Feller got leaded up," said Hashknife. "Feller named Quinn."

"Quinin Quinn, eh? Dead? The son-of-a-gun! Whatcha drinkin'? Seen Swede Sam over there, too. He ain't mixed up in

it, is he? Whatcha drinkin'? Know Quinn? Never smiled. No sir, that *hombre* didn't know how. Ain't no reason for killin' him off. Feller's got a right to look sour, ain't he? I'd sure have to have a good reason before I'd kill any man. Son-of-a-gun's dead, eh? Well, well! Whatcha drinkin'?"

"See-gars," said Hashknife grinning.

The bartender produced a well-worn cigar-box and disclosed a few dried-out perfectos.

"Ain't many cigar smokers around here," he volunteered. "Don't pay to keep a big stock. Them's real good Key Wests, y'betcha. I smoked one oncet. Got drunk and careless. 'F you lick them outside leaves, like you do a cigaret-paper, they'll stick. Them Key Wests allus kinda unravels thataway. I stuck 'em oncet, but they——"

Two very bad cigars went into a cuspidor, and the bartender looked sad.

"I didn't lick 'em," he explained. "I used glue."

"Tha's all right," grunted Hashknife. "A cigar ain't never good after the first drag or two."

The bartender turned and threw the two-bits into the till.

"Have a drink on the house?" he asked.

Hashknife shook his head.

"Feller that'd use glue on cigars is liable to put cyanid in his hooch. Who owns this ornate parlor?"

"'Spot' Easton. Didja ever hear of Spot?"

Hashknife leaned against the bar and admitted that he did not know the gentleman. Just at this moment a man came in the door, a frowsy looking man, with drink-bleared eyes and uncertain step. He slouched up to the bar and leered at the bartender; a leer which was intended to be an ingratiating smile, but which missed by a wide margin.

"Nossir!" The bartender shook his head violently. "Spot said to lay off givin' you liquor, 'Lonesome'."

"Spot did?" The old man seemed surprized to hear it.

He wiped the back of his hand across his lips and stared at the mirror on the back-bar. There was no question but what he needed a bracer; his whole nervous system cried out for assistance.

"You get the drink, grampaw," said Hashknife, tossing a two-bit piece on the bar.

"Spot don't want him—" began the bartender.

"Hooch!" snapped Hashknife. "What in —— do I care what Spot wants?"

"He'll get sore about it," argued the bartender.

"Do I have to wait on him m'self?" asked Hashknife.

The bartender slid out the bottle and a glass. The old man seemed undecided whether to take it or not, but Hashknife settled the question by pouring the drink for him. The old man drank nervously and upset the glass as he put it back. He steadied himself on the bar until the liquor began to percolate and then sighed with relief.

A man came from the rear of the place and halted near the end of the bar. He was rather flashily dressed for the range country. His black hair was slightly tinged with gray. His features were narrow and he wore a small mustache, which was waxed to needle-like points. He scowled at the bartender, who got very busy wiping glasses.

The old man considered Hashknife and Sleepy for a moment, and began to search his pockets. He drew out a crumpled envelop and held it close for inspection.

"M' name's James B. Lee," he announced thickly, "but ev'ybody calls me Lonesome Lee. Now, what in —— do you reckon anybody'd write a letter to me for? This'n jist come on the stage."

He handed the letter to Hashknife, or rather he started to; but the flashily-dressed person had moved nearer and secured it. For a moment nobody spoke. Lonesome swallowed with great difficulty and tried to clear his throat.

"Right sudden, ain't you?" said Sleepy.

The man ignored his question and spoke directly to Lonesome Lee.

"Nobody ever wrote to you, Lonesome."

"Yeah, they did, Spot. I—I—" whined Lonesome.

"The envelop will show who it's for," said Hashknife easily.

Spot Easton turned to the bartender.

"'Windy,' how many times do I have to tell you not to let Lonesome have any more whisky?"

"Lay off the bartender," advised Hashknife. "I paid for the old man's drink, if you care to know."

Spot Easton seemed to see Hashknife for the first time, and the discovery did not please him.

"Who in —— are you?" he growled.

"Me?" Hashknife grinned. "I'm the li'l jasper that's goin' to make you give the letter back to Lonesome Lee."

"Yeah?"

Easton's brows lifted in surprize, as he looked Hashknife over appraisingly.

"How are you goin' to do it, if I may ask?"

Hashknife turned his body toward the bar. It was a disarming move. Easton stepped in closer to Hashknife; stepped in just in time to be in reach of the right swing that Hashknife pivoted to accomplish.

It caught Mr. Easton flush on the left ear and the force of the smash knocked the gentleman's feet loose from the floor. The thud of his fall had barely sounded, when Hashknife leaned over him and took away the letter.

Easton did not move. The piano crashed a discord and stopped. One of the girls gave a throaty little squeak and stopped dancing. Hashknife turned to hand the letter to Lonesome Lee, but that worthy was going out of the front door as fast as his unsteady legs would carry him.

"Well, that kinda beats ——!" grunted Hashknife.

The bartender had dropped the glass he was polishing, but continued the action on the bunched fingers of his left hand. He breathed on the fingers and polished harder.

Spot Easton sat up, holding his left ear. He looked around as if wondering what had happened. His eyes strayed to the ceiling, as if wondering that it was still intact. Then he got slowly to his feet and brushed the dust off his broadcloth raiment.

"You asked a question," reminded Hashknife seriously, "but I don't reckon you need an answer—not now."

Spot Easton did not express any opinion. He wadded a silk handkerchief against his bruised ear, turned, and went to the back of the room.

"I've got the letter and nobody to give it to," chuckled Hashknife, and then to the bartender—

"Whatcha polishin' your fingers for, pardner?"

The bartender, suddenly realizing that he did not have a glass in his hand, recovered the one from the floor.

"What'sa matter with everybody around here?" asked Sleepy. "The old man hummed out of here like a spike, and you got absent-minded. Ain't the War-Bonnet used to seein' trouble, or is all this honkatonk only a blind for a Sunday school?"

"That—that was Spot Easton," stammered the bartender.

"Who's he—the king?" asked Hashknife.

The bartender glanced keenly toward the rear of the place, where Easton had entered one of the built-in rooms. He leaned across the bar and whispered:

"You better look out for him, gents. Spot Easton's a ——winder, y'betcha. He's quicker'n a flash with a gun, and he used to be a middle-weight prize-fighter. Glad it ain't me he's sore at."

"You don't reckon he's sore at me, do you?" Hashknife seemed penitent.

"Huh?" Such a foolish question amazed the bartender.

"Gee cripes! He must be touchy if he is," observed Sleepy. "Some folks wears their feelin' on their sleeves."

"Well, for ——'s sake!" wailed the bartender. "I dunno whatcha mean by that. If you got hit in the ear——"

"Aw, come on, Sleepy," said Hashknife. "Never seen a bartender or a sheepherder yet that had any sense."

As they started to cross the street, a rider on a mouse-colored horse passed in front of them, going down toward the sheriff's office. The man was almost as tall as Hashknife; his features were hidden by the shadow of his low-pulled Stetson.

Bliz Skelton and the sheriff were coming away from the office, and the sheriff hailed this rider, who swung over to the board sidewalk beside them.

"Wears bat-wing chaps, beaded vest and a polky-dot shirt," observed Hashknife aloud, "rides with his stirrups a notch too short; all of which makes me feel that I know that *hombre*, Sleepy."

"Let's look him over," suggested Sleepy. "Looks a li'l gaudy to me, but mebbe he's all right."

The stranger was talking earnestly to the sheriff, as they walked up, and the conversation seemed to interest Skelton. The stranger turned and looked at Hashknife, but continued to talk.

"I dunno," said Skelton, shaking his head. "I'm much obliged to you, but I ain't made up my mind yet jist what I'm goin' t' do. 'F I sell out I won't need no hired help."

"And if you don't, you do."

The sheriff was a trifle ungrammatical, but sincere.

"Yeah," admitted Skelton.

"It don't make me no never mind," stated the stranger. "I'm just open f'r engagement. Jake'll tell you that I'm a top-hand, y'betcha."

"All of which makes it so," stated Hashknife.

Jake Blue squinted at Hashknife and up at the cowboy. The latter seemed surprized that any one might doubt his ability.

"Who 're you?" asked the cowboy.

"Names don't mean nothin'," replied Hashknife. "I don't know your name, but I ain't inquisitive. 'Pears to me that I've knowed you some'ers."

"Huh!"

The cowboy's eyebrows lifted slightly, but no sign of recognition crossed his features. He was not at all handsome—due partly to a crooked nose, a split lip and a week's growth of downy, blond whiskers.

"What are you cuttin' in here fer?" asked Blue angrily. "Mister Hagen's goin' t' work for Skelton."

"Zasso?" Skelton seemed surprized. "I ain't hired nobody yet, Blue."

"You ain't goin' to have work for three men, are you?" asked Hashknife, turning to Skelton.

"Three men?" queried Blue quickly.

"T-h-r-e-e," spelled Hashknife. "Me and Sleepy's done hired out to him."

The sheriff spat explosively and looked at Skelton.

"Zasso, Skelton?"

"Well, yuh—uh—might say it was," faltered Skelton.

"I'm goin' to be the foreman," stated Hashknife, "and if you got any top-hands, you might send 'em to me, sheriff."

"——!"

Mr. Hagen spoke very peevishly, turned his horse and rode back to the War-Bonnet hitch-rack. There he dismounted, kicked his horse in the belly, and went into the saloon.

"There ain't no question but what he's a top-hand," agreed Hashknife. "All top-hands kick their broncs in the belly thataway. Kinda makes the bronc respect you."

"Where's the Swede?" asked Sleepy.

Jake Blue had been staring toward the War-Bonnet, deep in thought, and Sleepy's question seemed to jar him awake.

"The Swede? He's in jail. Where'd you think he was?"

"In jail," said Sleepy.

"Then what in —— did you ask fer?" Mr. Blue growled.

"You can't hook that killin' onto the Swede." This from Hashknife.

"Can't I?" The sheriff grew very indignant. "Well, mebbe I ain't goin' t' try very hard."

He stepped off the sidewalk as if to leave, but turned and added—

"'F I was you I'd be hopin' that it was hooked onto the Swede."

With this parting shot, the sheriff crossed the street and went into the Paris restaurant; banging the door behind him.

"You made him mad," observed Skelton seriously. "He was only tryin' to git a job for this Hagen feller."

"Who's this Hagen?" asked Hashknife.

"I dunno him. He's been with the 88 f'r a while, but he quit, or got fired or somethin'."

"Who owns the 88?"

"Lonesome Lee used t' own it, but he drank it mostly all up, I reckon. Mebbe Spot Easton owns it by now. Lonesome got t' drinkin' and playin' poker, and I reckon he's lost all the money he ever had. He stays at the ranch—when he ain't drunk—which ain't often."

"Big outfit?" asked Hashknife.

"Bigger'n mine," answered Skelton.

"With two top-hands your ranch ought to grow," stated Hashknife seriously. "You don't mind us hirin' out to you?"

"I dunno where your pay's comin' from, but I don't mind, if you don't. Want to go back to the ranch now?"

Hashknife shook his head.

"No-o-o. You see I knocked Spot Easton loose from the floor a while ago, and if we left now it would look like I was runnin' away."

"You did!" gasped Skelton. "Spot Easton? Well——"

Skelton scratched his head and squinted at Hashknife's serious face.

"Well, I—I reckon yo're a top-hand, Hartley. Come out to the ranch any ol' time you git ready. Whoo-ee!"

The old man slapped his hat back on his head and bow-legged his way back to the sheriff's office.

Hashknife took the letter from his pocket and looked at it.

"She sure belongs to Lonesome Lee, Sleepy. The epitaph proclaims it to be for

James B. Lee, Caldwell, Montana, and the little doohicky in a circle says that she was sent from Boston."

"Now, whatcha reckon Mister Easton wanted this here letter for, Sleepy?"

"Don't glare at me!" complained Sleepy. "You act like it was my letter. How'd I know what Easton wants?"

"Where did the old man go?" asked Hashknife, paying no heed to Sleepy's question.

"There you go ag'in! Think I'm a fortune-teller? You saw him the last time I did."

"Well, I reckon the only way to find him is to look for him. Come on."

They went up the sidewalk, past the Hole-in-the-Wall feed-corral, and almost bumped into Lonesome Lee, who was coming out from the narrow alley between the feed-corral and general store. The old man's cheeks were streaked with tears and dust, and he was half-sobbing—drunkenly. He gawped at Hashknife and Sleepy and tried to avoid them, but Hashknife took him by the arm and drew him back.

"What's the matter with you?" growled Hashknife. "Ain't nobody goin' to hurt you, old-timer. Here's your letter."

Lonesome Lee stared at the letter, but made no effort to take it. In fact he seemed afraid of it.

"You ain't scared of Spot Easton, are you?" asked Sleepy.

Lonesome did not say, but his actions spoke volumes.

"Has that tin-horn got you buffaloed, old-timer? Snap yourself together! You've blotted up so much hooch that your nerves are dancin', but you're a —— good man yet." Hashknife's voice was encouraging.

"Th-think so?"

Lonesome wiped his lips with shaking fingers and moved his feet uncertainly.

"Better read the letter," urged Sleepy. "It might be good news; you never can tell."

"Wh-where's it from?" he stammered. "My eyes ain't worth a —— no more."

"She's from Boston."

Lonesome licked his lips and stared into space.

"Bub-Boston! ——!"

He staggered off the sidewalk, almost fell in the dust, and weaved a crooked trail straight for the doorway of the War-Bonnet.

" 'F that don't beat ——, I'm a pigeon-toed fool!" grunted Hashknife foolishly.

"His ear-drums kinda shrink from Boston," observed Sleepy, as Lonesome seemed to carom from one side of the door to the other.

"Scared plumb to death," declared Hashknife. "It's a danged shame for a man to get in that shape. Somethin' has sure put the Injun sign on the old gent, Sleepy. This Easton's a bass-drummer among these canary-birds, 'cordin' to what I can get in my loop; so he must be somethin' besides a card shark."

"Let's go over and talk to the blacksmith," suggested Sleepy. "I've got to have some shoes put on my bronc' pretty soon, and maybe I can save about four-bits by gettin' real friendly. I have done it, by cripes."

Barney Stout was inserting a new felly into a wagon-wheel, and swearing mournfully over the fitting. He rubbed his nose with the back of a very dirty hand and nodded to Hashknife and Sleepy. They had squatted down against the wall and were rolling cigarets.

"How's tricks?" asked Sleepy.

"Tricks?"

Barney squinted at the rim of the wheel, as he felt of the joint with a thumb.

"There ain't no tricks in this trade; it's all —— hard work and disappointment. Hear they put the Swede in jail."

Barney rubbed his hands on his hips and, reaching for Sleepy's sack of tobacco, squatted down beside them.

"I dunno who killed Quinin Quinn, but it's a dead immortal cinch that Swede Sam never did."

"Where'd that .30-30 rifle come from, do you figure?" asked Hashknife.

Barney shook his head and puffed violently.

"I never seen the gun," he said. "Quinn tol' me that he'd been shot at three or four times in the last year. 'S far as that's concerned, so has old Skelton."

"Any idea why?" asked Sleepy.

"Nope. I heard Jake Blue say that it was likely that folks hadn't forgot what happened to their graveyard—but Quinin didn't have nothin' to do with that. He came here quite a while after that."

"Folks got kinda sore about it, eh?" queried Hashknife.

"Yeap. Can you blame 'em? They sure as —— lost track of their ancestors. Ev'body tried to relocate their dead, but it was no use. M' wife had one of them Kodiak

things that you take pictures with, and she photygraphed the graveyard one day; but it's kinda blurred-like. They took that along to try and figure out things, but it didn't help 'em a danged bit."

"Lots of folks buried there, eh?" queried Hashknife.

Barney nodded.

"All them markers in Skelton's yard indicates a body. The first corpse was old Billy Meek, who was some sanctimonious old whippoorwill; and the last one was a gambler by the name of 'Faro'. I never did know his name.

"Spot Easton shot him over a poker-table. Folks kicked about him bein' buried in the cemetery, and old 'Peg-leg' Smith refused to dig the grave; but Spot and Doc Clevis dug the grave, and I reckon Jake Blue performed the funeral oration—I dunno. Anyway, Faro never got a headstone, 'cause his grave-mound was lost with the rest."

"Did they bury this here Faro person right in with the rest?" asked Hashknife.

"Danged if I know for sure. Seems to me that somebody said they planted him off to one side; kinda between the others and the creek. I never seen the grave."

Came the sound of a boot on gravel, and they turned to see Doctor Clevis coming in the front door. He peered at Hashknife and Sleepy.

"Wanted to tell you that the inquest'll be held t'morrow afternoon 'bout two o'clock," he announced. "Likely need your testimony."

"We'll be here," nodded Hashknife.

The doctor walked out, and Barney got to his feet.

"Gotta git that —— felly fixed up, I suppose," he groaned. "Hope I never git sick and have to call Doc Clevis. Him and Jake Blue are thicker'n two drunks in one bunk. Besides, I never like to have any truck with a doctor who is the undertaker, too."

"Gets 'em goin' and comin', eh?"

"Gotta cinch," agreed Barney. "And Jake Blue ain't as particular as he might be, especially when the reward notice don't specify 'dead or alive.' "

"We'll see you again, pardner," said Hashknife, as he and Sleepy walked out the front door.

"Come in any ol' time," yelled Barney. "Mostly always I've got time to talk."

Hashknife led the way past the War-Bonnet and up to the hitch-rack where they got on their horses and rode back toward the Tombstone Ranch. Hashknife looked back and saw Hagen standing in the doorway, looking in their direction; but there was no sign of Lonesome Lee nor of Spot Easton.

"Do you reckon they'll hang the killin' onto Swede Sam?" asked Sleepy, as they poked off down the dusty road.

Hashknife eased himself in the saddle and reached for his cigaret material.

"I'll do everythin' I can to hook it onto him," he said.

"You will?" Sleepy's surprize was genuine.

"Sure will. Me and you and Skelton have got to lie like —— to keep out of jail ourselves."

"But the Swede never killed him."

"Neither did we, Sleepy. I reckon Mrs. Frosty Snow can get along without Swede Sam for a while—and Swede Sam ain't got brains enough to mind bein' locked up."

"But they couldn't put me and you in jail," protested Sleepy.

"Thasso? They put Swede Sam in."

Which left Sleepy without an argument worth while.

HASHKNIFE locked a long forefinger around his spoon and fended it away from his right eye, while he sipped thoughtfully at his cup of coffee. Finally he nodded slowly.

"Yeah, that's true, Skelton. Whisky does pe-culiar things to a man's nerves; but why does ol' Lonesome go hippety-hoppin' like a scared rabbit when he sees that danged letter?"

Skelton helped himself to more coffee from the old battered pot and reached for Sleepy's cup.

"Not any more, Bliz," said Sleepy. "You ought to grind that coffee before and after makin', 'cause she's sure hard to chew."

"Lonesome Lee's sure in tough shape," admitted Skelton, ignoring Sleepy's insult to his ability as a coffee maker.

Hashknife took the letter from his pocket and studied it closely.

"Steam," said Sleepy slowly. "Steam'll cut the stickum on an envelop."

Hashknife squinted hard at Sleepy.

"That's a crooked thought, Mister Stevens. Sometimes you surprize me."

"You say that Spot Easton wanted the letter?" asked Skelton.

Hashknife yawned widely and glanced around the room.

"Skelton, you ain't got anythin' like mucilage, have you?"

"Y'betcha, I have. Li'l bottle, with a brush attached. I dunno what it was used fer, and she's been here since before Heck's father went wooin'. Whatcha want it fer?"

"To make this danged letter look like it never was opened."

Sleepy grinned joyously.

"Gimme credit——"

"Fer nothin'," finished Hashknife. "That was a common thing before your great, great-grandfather was lynched for tryin' to tell folks what to do."

Hashknife held the envelop over the steam from the tea-kettle, until the flap was softened, and removed the letter. He spread out the single sheet on the table, and the three of them read it together.

DEAR DAD:

I will arrive nearly as soon as this letter, but am sending it anyway. I hope that your injured arm is better now. It was very kind of your foreman, Mr. Easton, to write in your stead, and I shall thank him personally for his offer to meet me at Gunsight.

I can hardly wait to see you. Just to think that I have never seen you since I was old enough to remember, but we will make that all up, daddy. I have just money enough to take me to Caldwell, and I am coming as fast as I can travel.

Since mother passed out I have felt entirely alone in the world, and even if you and mother could not be happy together, I am sure we can. Loads of love and a big hug very soon.

Your loving daughter,

JANE.

P. S.—I will be with you in time to celebrate my eighteenth birthday.

Along the margin of the paper was written—

I am glad you liked the picture of myself, which I sent you, daddy.

Hashknife lifted his eyes from the paper and looked at Skelton, who was moving his lips slowly over the written words. Skelton straightened up and shook his head.

"I don't *sabe* that foreman stuff. Spot Easton never was foreman of the 88."

"Has Lonesome Lee been nursin' a sore arm?" asked Sleepy.

Skelton laughed shortly.

"'F he has, I never knowed it. That letter's sure got me pawin' m' head. I never knowed that Lonesome Lee had a wife or daughter."

"And," added Hashknife meaningly, "Spot Easton was kind enough to want to meet her in Gunsight. He was also doin' the writin' for Lonesome, 'cause Lonesome had a sore arm."

"Whatcha make of it, Hashknife?" asked Sleepy.

Hashknife pondered over the manufacture of a cigaret, and read the letter again before he spoke.

"'Pears to me that the lady done sent her picture, previous. Mebbe she's pretty, which would attract Mister Easton. It also appears that Mister Easton has got old Lonesome Lee where the hair's short and tender, and he's kinda runnin' Lonesome's business.

"Accordin' to signs, Mister Easton has lied to said lady, who thinks her paw is somebody. Paw ain't got no nerve left to object, and Mister Easton has likely told him that he has invited this here daughter to live at the 88. Paw ain't got the guts to howl against such things, and when he finds that the letter is from Boston he's plumb shaky that it tells about daughter's de-parture. Mister Easton naturally is wishful to know how his invite has worked out; which is the reason he grabbed at the letter. That's how she looks to me."

"'F that's a fact, I sure as —— feel sorry fer her," stated Skelton sadly.

"Yuh might feel sorry for Lonesome, too," said Hashknife. "He's all shot to pieces with hooch, and he likely knows that she's comin' to find him."

"Figurin' she's goin' to be happy with him," added Sleepy mournfully. "Comin' to celebrate her eighteenth birthday. ——!"

Hashknife got to his feet and walked over to the open door, where he leaned against the casing and contemplated deeply. The sun had already dropped behind the hills, which looked like blue silhouettes, with silver trimmings. Far away on the skyline drifted a herd of cattle; their outlines blurred from the back-light of the sunset.

From below the long sheds came a string of cattle, heading for the water-hole opening on the brushy stream; bawling softly, as they followed the deeply-worn trail. Magpies chattered sleepily in the cotton-woods.

"Makes a feller wonder how a man can live in a land like this and hate anybody," muttered Hashknife.

He turned to come back to the table, when—

Ping-g-g—Whop!

Skelton fell backward out of his chair, clawing at the coffee, which sprayed all over him. Sleepy threw himself sidewise out of line with the door, and from somewhere came the thin, whip-like report of a high-powered rifle.

Hashknife kicked the door shut and gawped at Skelton, who got to his feet, shook the coffee out of his eyes, and picked up the coffee-pot—or what remained of it.

The soft-nose bullet had hit it near the bottom and there was nothing much left to identify it as a coffee-pot, except the color and odor. Even the ceiling was dotted with coffee-grounds.

"Anybody hurt?" asked Hashknife.

Skelton gazed ruefully at the remains of the pot, and dug inside his collar after more grounds.

"——!" he snapped. "They didn't miss us very far that time."

"Common occurrence?" asked Hashknife.

"Periodical. Last week I was shakin' some stuff out of a fry-pan outside, and they nailed the ol' pan, dead-center. Wrenched —— out of m' wrist, too. Never even saw where the bullet came from. I dunno whether they're hintin' fer me to move, or missin' their target."

"Got —— good eyes, if they shot at that pot," grunted Hashknife, "'cause that rifle wasn't closer than five hundred yards."

"Cat-eyes," added Sleepy. "Nobody could see into a house at this time of the day. That *hombre* wasn't aimin' to spill our coffee, y' betcha."

"Got a rifle, Skelton?" This from Hashknife.

"Dang right I have."

He walked over to one of the bunks and threw back the blankets. He ran his hand over them, dug under the straw-tick, and stepped back, looking curiously around.

"What do you know about that?" he grunted. "It ain't there!"

"Are you sure?" asked Hashknife.

"Lemme think. It was there yeste'day, 'cause I took it out when I made the bed. I know danged well—no, I 'member leanin' it agin' the wall."

He glanced around the room and shook his head.

"Don't make a —— bit of difference; it's gone."

"What kind was she?" asked Sleepy.

"Winchester .30-30."

"That wasn't it we found near the Swede, was it?"

"No-o-o—I'm —— 'f I know whether it was or not. I never looked at it. Fact is, I never used it. I'm not worth a —— with a rifle, but I sure do *sabe* the old shotgun and buckshot, or a six-gun. Never liked that idea of shootin' a man with a mushroom bullet."

"Does kinda unravel a man," Hashknife agreed. "When did you buy that .30-30?"

"I acquired it with this —— ranch, along with the rest of the misery."

Hashknife nodded slowly and considered the ceiling. A question had suddenly popped into his head and he wanted to consider it before speaking. The coffee-grounds were beginning to loosen from the ceiling, and some of them drifted into his eye. He dug them out thoughtfully and turning to Skelton said—

"You got any relations, Skelton?"

"Not a danged kin," grinned Skelton. "One of my kind is e-nough, ain't it?"

"'F you got killed," suggested Hashkinfe, "who'd get this ranch?"

Skelton scratched his head violently.

"Never thought of that, Hartley. Why, I reckon the sheriff would sell it to the highest bidder. But who would bid on it—I dunno.

"Shucks!" Skelton added. "It must be somethin' pers'nal. Nobody'd kill me to get a chance to buy this —— ranch. That ain't reasonable."

"Human nature is a queer thing," said Hashknife. "I knowed a feller who was sent to the penitentiary for stealin' Christmas presents, which were goin' to be given to him."

"Why didn't you add the fact that he knowed it?"

"I know when to quit lyin'," said Hashknife gravely.

He got to his feet, went to the door, and peered out.

"Gets dark quick around here," he said. "I reckon it's plumb safe to saddle up now. That bushwhacker likely went away as soon as he fired that one shot."

"Saddle up? What for, f'r gosh sake?"

Sleepy settled back comfortably in his chair.

"Me and you are goin' to Caldwell."

"What fer?"

"That inquest is tomorrow afternoon, Sleepy."

"Oh, I see," said Sleepy sarcastically. "'Fraid you'll be late if you don't start now?"

"You might put it thataway," admitted Hashknife. "We'll be back kinda late, Skelton, I reckon; so I'll call m' name when we come home."

Skelton nodded dubiously and said:

"'S your own business, Hartley, and I reckon you can take care of yourself. I dunno what you got on your mind, but I wish you well."

Hashknife grinned at Sleepy's disgruntled way of pulling on his chaps, and went out of the door. Sleepy swore softly as he followed him.

SPOT EASTON was not in a happy frame of mind at all. His ear had swollen to twice its normal size and had assumed the shade of a pickled beet. It not only pained him, but it hurt his pride; he was not in the habit of getting the worst of a personal encounter.

The evening business of the War-Bonnet was beginning to be audible to Spot, who was sequestered in his little private room in the rear. A half-empty whisky bottle decorated the table beside him, and his jaws were clamped tightly over a badly frayed cigar, which smoked much from the wrong end. He jerked it out of his mouth, cursed and hurled it across the room where it continued to throw up a streamer of smoke.

Just then, without any warning, the door swung open and Lonesome Lee staggered in. The old man was gloriously drunk, but tried to brace up when he faced Easton.

"Sus-somebody said you wanted to shee me," he muttered thickly.

"Yes; you lousy old bum!" snapped Easton, kicking a chair away from the table.

Lonesome eased himself shakily into the chair and sprawled weakly.

"Where's that letter?" demanded Easton.

"Tha' letter?" Lonesome grinned foolishly. "Wha' letter?"

"The one you got today. The letter—oh, ——!"

Lonesome had emitted a long-drawn snore and his head sank slowly until his chin was buried in his collar.

Spot Easton shoved away from the table and, going over to Lonesome, proceeded to go through the old man's pockets. He shook Lonesome, but the old man continued to snore loudly.

Spot caressed his aching ear, while he reviled Lonesome with every foul epithet his tongue could command. Tiring of that, he drank half of the remaining liquor, threw the bottle across the room, and sat down again.

Then came Jack Blue. He too was a privileged character and did not wait to knock on the door. He squinted at Lonesome and sat on the edge of the table.

"Why don't you have Doc Clevis fix up yore ear?" he asked; noticing that Easton was fingering the sore organ.

"That —— veterinary!" exploded Easton.

"Doc could take out the soreness."

"I'm —— if he could!" rasped Easton. "Only one thing'd take the soreness out of that ear, and that's to notch a sight on that long-geared misfit that hit me."

"He's a fresh whippoorwill, all right," admitted Blue. "Never seen anybody with the gall he's got. Somebody's due to make jerky out of his tongue."

"Y'betcha," agreed Easton, "and I'm him."

Blue jerked his head toward the sleeping Lonesome——

"Did he have that letter, Spot?"

"Naw!"

"That puncher still got it?"

Spot looked very disconsolate, but did not answer.

"What was in it, do you reckon?"

"How'd I know?"

Blue gnawed off an enormous chew of tobacco and moved to a chair.

"'F he's still got the letter I'll git it for you tomorrow, Spot."

"How?"

"Law requires that I search all prisoners, tha's why."

"Thasso?" Spot Easton grew interested. 'You goin' to put him in jail?"

"I sure as —— am. More'n that, I'm goin' to put the both of 'em in jail, along with old man Skelton."

"How you goin' to make it look right?"

Blue spat copiously and grinned at the ceiling.

"That was old Skelton's rifle which they found beside the drunk Swede."

"Skelton's rifle? And he brought it to you?"

"Nope. I went past there yesterday and I dropped in to call on Skelton—knowin' he was in town."

"And swiped his rifle?"

"Uh-huh. Belonged to old Bill Wheeler, and she's got a li'l 33 cut into the forearm. She's a cinch to hang it onto Skelton, and I can hold them other two—easy."

Easton laughed and got to his feet.

"You're clever, Jake. Let's go and get a drink."

"I sure am."

Blue was not adverse to applauding himself. Being a sheriff in Lodge-Pole county entailed too much danger for the remuneration; so nobody cared much about a sheriff's morals—or methods.

Easton gazed approvingly upon the amount of activity within the four walls of the War-Bonnet, as he led the sheriff to the bar. The click of dice, the rattle of poker-chips and the droning voices of dealers was sweet music to Easton's ears.

A number of men were standing at the bar, but Easton and Blue ignored them. Two cowboys were shaking dice on the bar-top at Easton's right hand.

" 'At's horse 'n horse," declared one of them. "One flop, Sleepy."

Easton shot a sidewise look at the speaker. It was the tall cowboy, who had hit him on the ear, standing elbow to elbow with him; intent on his dice shaking.

Easton slowly turned his head and looked at Blue, who was toying with his glass of liquor. The dice rattled.

"You're stuck!" exclaimed Hashknife.

Easton jerked his head around and looked square into Hashknife's face.

"How's the ear?" asked Hashknife.

The question placed Easton in an embarrassing position. He could not see Hashknife's right hand, and his own hands were on the bar. Blue squinted past Easton's shoulder at Hashknife, and Hashknife grinned at him.

Sleepy leaned forward on the bar and craned his neck around Hashknife.

"I hope to die, if I ain't terror-stricken!" he gasped. "We've been told that it's fash'nable to be plumb scared of Mister Easton; so we turns pale, politely."

Easton tore his eyes away from Hashknife's grinning face and looked straight into the back-bar. His mind worked swiftly, but got nowhere. He was being insulted in his own house. Jake Blue leaned away from the bar, as if to move into the crowd, but Sleepy stepped around behind Hashknife and Blue leaned back against the bar.

"Where's the old man—old Lonesome Lee?" asked Hashknife.

Easton turned quickly.

"What do you want of him?"

"Want to give him that letter," explained Hashknife.

"Oh!" Easton's grunt seemed to relieve him.

"'F he ain't around here, mebbe you could take care of it for him, eh?"

"Sheriff's nervous," interrupted Sleepy. " 'Pears to have a itch on his hip. Likely comes from a callous caused by packin' such a heavy gun."

Jake Blue scowled, but said nothing.

"I'll give him the letter," nodded Easton, trying to not appear too eager to be of service.

Hashknife's concealed right hand flipped the letter to the bar in front of Easton and dropped back. Easton picked up the letter and started to put it in his vest-pocket, but Hashknife stopped him.

"Whoa, Blaze!"

Easton stared at him wonderingly, as Hashknife motioned for him to stop.

"Not in a vest-pocket, pardner. Put it in your side pants-pocket, if you don't mind. That's the only pocket where a tin-horn gambler don't pack a derringer."

Easton scowled and shoved the letter into the designated pocket. He wondered if this tall cowpuncher was a mind reader, and knew that he was going to use the letter as an excuse to get at the two-barreled derringer in his vest-pocket.

"'F you don't stop hankerin' t' scratch—" Sleepy's voice held a note of menace—" 'f you don't, I'm goin' to get a piece of sand-paper and give you one good curryin', Mister Sheriff. Ain'tcha ashamed to scratch thataway in comp'ny?"

"By ——, I'm tired of this!" wailed the exasperated Mr. Blue. "Who're you, anyway, I'd like to know? What right you got to tell me when I can scratch and when I can't?"

"I'm just teachin' you how to act polite, ain't I?" complained Sleepy. "Gee cripes, you sure do act peevish over learnin' things. 'F I was you——"

"Don't tease the li'l gent, Sleepy," Hashknife said, chuckling. "His chilblains

has likely extended up to his hips. You know how cold feet makes you itch."

Hashknife kept his eyes on Easton, while talking direct to Sleepy, and he saw a flash of relief come over Easton's face. A man had stepped in behind him, brushing against Hashknife's right elbow, and Easton's eyes had followed this man.

The conversation had been even lower than ordinary and had attracted no attention.

IT ALL happened in a few seconds. As the man brushed Hashknife's arm, Hashknife stepped quickly away from the bar; stepped away just in time to let Hagen, the ex-88 cowboy, crash into Easton.

Hagen had intended to bump Hashknife hard enough to knock him off his balance, but he had not expected Hashknife to move so quickly.

Easton whirled half-around and jammed his heels on to Jake Blue's toes, while Hagen half-fell to his knees. Like a flash, Easton struck at Hashknife, and his bare knuckles came in contact with Hashknife's heavy six-shooter.

Sleepy sprang in to prevent Blue from drawing a gun, and his knee caught Hagen just under the chin; knocking his head against the solid bar with a dull *tunk!* Easton's right hand went out of commission and he stumbled awkwardly over Hagen's legs, falling flat on the floor, while Sleepy pinned Blue's arms in a bear-like hug, swung him up bodily and backed to the door. Hashknife backed swiftly out with him, covering the surprized crowd, which had no idea of what had been going on.

Once outside they went swiftly to the hitch-rack, with Sleepy still carrying the cursing sheriff.

"What'll I do with him?" panted Sleepy. "I don't want him."

"Got his gun?" asked Hashknife.

"It's back in the War-Bonnet."

"Let him loose," laughed Hashknife. "We ain't collectin' knick-knacks."

Sheriff Blue sat down so heavily in the hard street that his tongue, for once, refused to function. Hashknife and Sleepy mounted swiftly and whirled back past the War-Bonnet, where men were crowding the doorway.

Spot Easton cursed bitterly as he saw them flash past the beams of yellow light, then he turned back to "Blondy" Hagen, who was still sitting in front of the bar, holding his head in his hands.

Easton's right hand was deeply cut and swelling rapidly. He cursed it fluently and turned to see Jake Blue coming in, covered with dust, his face badly scratched.

Blue had nothing to say. Men crowded around them, wondering what had been the reason for the fight, but none of the three victims seemed inclined to explain things. Hagen got to his feet and started for the door.

"You!" gritted Easton bitterly.

Hagen scowled blackly and shouldered his way out of the door, where he turned and glared back at Easton.

"Aw! You be ——!" he snorted, and went away.

"It's a large night," said Blue inanely.

THE coroner's inquest over the remains of Quinin Quinn caused little excitement in Caldwell. The fact that Quinin was dead was enough in itself; who killed him, was merely conjectured and Lodge-Pole county felt that it would remain so, according to precedent.

The jury listened patiently to Hashknife, Sleepy and Skelton, while Doc Clevis, puffing with his own importance, cross-questioned them. Swede Sam was there, blank-faced over the whole thing, and all that Doc Clevis could get from him was:

"Ay dunno. Ay am de cook."

Neither Easton nor Blondy Hagen was at the inquest, which was held at the doctor's home. Sheriff Blue glared silently at the floor during the proceedings, looking at no one.

"Sheriff," said Doc Clevis, turning away from Swede Sam, "you've got a little evidence to show the jury, ain't you?"

Jake Blue looked straight at Hashknife for a moment and then he answered—

"Nope."

"Why, I—I thought——"

Doc Clevis seemed surprized.

Blue shook his head.

"We-e-ll, I reckon that's all—then," said the doctor slowly, looking at Blue.

He turned to the jury and added—

"You can think this over now, and——"

"It ain't goin' to require much thinkin'," said a raw-boned cattleman. "These two strangers tell a straight story, and Skelton sure never shot Quinn."

"What about the Swede?" asked the doctor.

"I reckon the sheriff ought to apologize to him for puttin' him in jail at all."

Blue scowled, but said nothing.

"It'll be the reg'lar verdict, Doc," nodded one of the jury. "We finds that Quinin Quinn demises at the hands of a party, or parties, unknown. And," he added, "that sure as —— ain't settin' no new example around here."

The jury nodded and got to their feet.

"You're free, Swede," grunted Blue savagely.

"Das goot," nodded Swede Sam, getting to his feet. "Now Ay buy drink—for me."

Blue hurriedly left the room ahead of the rest, and went straight to the War-Bonnet. Spot Easton was near the door evidently waiting for news, but Blue silently headed straight for the private room, and Easton followed him.

Blue flopped down in a chair and bit savagely into a plug of tobacco. His jaws fairly quivered as he spat out the twisted piece of metal—the trademark on the plug.

"Hook it on to 'em, Jake?" asked Easton, easing himself into a chair.

"Hook ——!" Blue's vocal cords seemed to unhook with a bang.

"What do you mean, Jake? Didn't the jury——?"

"To —— with the jury! They turned the Swede loose and said that Quinn was killed by parties unknown; that's what happened!"

"——!" grunted Easton. "I thought you was so —— clever."

"Thasso?"

Blue masticated rapidly as if trying to control his temper.

"How about that rifle?" asked Easton.

Blue spat explosively.

"You want to know, do you? So do I! I had that rifle in a rack in my office. I had three more rifles in that same rack. I went to git that rifle this mornin' and——"

"It wasn't there, eh?" interrupted Easton.

"Your —— right it wasn't! Neither was the other three."

"You're clever," admitted Easton. "Clever as ——! What did you leave——"

"Lemme alone!" snarled Blue. "Don'tcha ride me, Spot! If you thought of that, why didn't you say so? You're so danged smart that you always see mistakes after they happen."

Easton made no reply to this, and a deep gloom seemed to pervade the little room: Blue chewed mechanically, his eyes closed, a picture of abject despair; while Easton considered his bandaged right hand, which ached badly. His knuckles still tingled from contact with that heavy gun.

"Hagen knows that tall jasper," he volunteered.

"Yeah?"

Blue spat and leaned back.

"Name's Hashknife. Hagen says he a fightin' hound."

"My ——!" exploded Blue. "D' you need to be told?"

After another long period of silence Easton said—

"I'm goin' to make a trip to Gunsight, Jake."

"Thasso? What fer?"

"Business. Leavin' pretty soon."

Jake Blue got to his feet and walked to the door, where he turned and squinted at Easton.

"What in —— do I care where you go? I'm gittin' sick of havin' eve'thing goin' wrong all the time. If we're goin' to let that long-geared coyote run this country, let's both go and give him room. We ain't a —— bit better off 'n we was."

"Takes time, Jake." Easton's tone was conciliatory.

Blue masticated viciously.

"Where's Doc goin' to bury Quinn?"

"I dunno, but I think Doc's goin' to start a new graveyard with Quinn. Said he'd picked out a spot back of town. Is that Hashknife person still here?"

"—— him; I suppose so. If I was you I'd sneak out the back way, Spot—if you want to git away safe-like."

Jake Blue slammed the door behind him and went down the big room, half-grinning to himself. At least it was some satisfaction to goad Spot Easton, who was losing prestige about as fast as possible. Easton's reputation had been earned, but he seemed to be running into a series of hard-luck and mistakes. Jake Blue also felt that the god of luck had deserted him, but he blamed everybody except himself. He went out of the front door and ran into Doc Clevis.

"I've been lookin' for you," stated Clevis. "What happened to you, Jake? Was you afraid to produce that rifle?"

Blue cursed solemnly and told the doctor what he had told Spot Easton. Doc

Clevis removed his hat and polished his bald head with his palm.

"Somebody," declared the doctor, "stole them guns."

"Didja think they walked away?" Blue said sarcastically, and added—

"Where'd Skelton and them two longhorns go to?"

Doc Clevis did not know. He was dry, and he offered to buy a drink, but Jake Blue refused.

"You better let me look you over," said the doctor. "Any time you refuses a drink, you're sick."

Jake Blue turned wearily away from the doctor and went toward the office. Spot Easton went to the livery-stable and in a few minutes he came out driving a tall, bay horse hitched to a top-buggy. He drove to the sheriff's doorway, where Blue leaned dejectedly.

"I'm goin' to Gunsight," said Easton.

"You've got my consent," grunted Blue, and as Easton drove out of town he added, "I hope t' —— you run off a grade and never hit bottom."

HASHKNIFE, Sleepy and Skelton had left town immediately following the inquest. Hashknife was standing in the ranch-house doorway when Easton drove past, headed for Gunsight—the terminus of a branch railroad.

Easton did not look toward the house, but Hashknife recognized him.

"There goes the foreman of the 88, Skelton," he said.

"Th' son-of-a-rooster!" grunted Skelton. "He's done read that letter and he's goin' to meet her in Gunsight."

Easton disappeared around a curve in a cloud of dust, and Hashknife rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"How far's it to Gunsight?"

"Thirty miles—about."

"Huh!" Hashknife cogitated deeply. "If she comes in tonight, he'll likely make the return trip with her."

"Danged lonesome ride at night," observed Skelton.

Sleepy came up from the corral and sat down on the steps.

"What's the matter, long feller?" he asked as he noticed Hashknife's thoughtful expression.

"That's what Easton likely wants," mused Hashknife, ignoring Sleepy's question. "A feller don't lie in a letter, without havin' some kind of an ax to grind."

"Lemme in on it, will you?" asked Sleepy.

"Spot Easton just went past in a top-buggy, and he's headin' for Gunsight."

"That's good. I reckon we can get along without him."

"But," said Hashknife slowly, "you gotta figure that the girl's only eighteen years old. She won't *sabe* Spot Easton."

"I dunno much about human nature," said Sleepy, "but I do know danged well that I'm hungry. Don't we ever eat on this new job, Bliz?"

"Y'betcha," grinned Skelton. "I'm goin' t' rustle some bull-beef and bakin'-powder biscuits right now. I was just wonderin' why that rifle never showed up at the inquest."

"Did your rifle have any mark on it, Skelton?"

"I dunno. I sure as —— couldn't identify it."

"Thassall right then," grinned Hashknife. "Me and Sleepy examined 'em all before we sunk 'em in the crick—they all looked alike to us."

Skelton scratched his head violently and squinted at Hashknife.

"You—uh—oh, ——, yes! I know what you mean now. Top-hands, y'betcha—yes sir."

Skelton went into the house and in a few moments he was busy with biscuit-dough, while Sleepy and Hashknife humped up on the steps and manufactured cigarets.

"Thirty miles to Gunsight," observed Hashknife. "Right pretty little ride."

"Yeah, it is," admitted Sleepy.

"She sure is, Sleepy; nice li'l ride. We'll saddle up as soon as we folds the stummick around a little provender."

"Saddle up?" queried Sleepy. "You ain't——"

"We are," corrected Hashknife.

"Aw-w!" Sleepy protested softly. "You're the dangdest person t' hop into——"

"What'd you do, Sleepy?"

"Well, it ain't our business noways, Hashknife."

"Supposin' Spot Easton was goin' to meet your sister?"

"But she ain't my sister."

"'F you was Lonesome Lee's son, she would be. Suppose you was, Sleepy."

"I ain't—not even supposin', Hashknife.

Gosh a'mighty! Thirty miles! I suppose you'd go if it was sixty."

"Sixty miles ain't much."

"I never been able to figure you out, Hashknife." Sleepy shook his head disconsolately. "You do the dangdest things I ever seen. Some day you're goin' to horn into things what don't concern you, and you'll meet a hunk of lead—face to face.

"You always kind of go out of your way to bother into other folks' troubles. Every danged place we go you gets into some dang kind of a mixup, and she's always because you feel sorry fer somebody. If it was only you I'd say for you to go to it and grab a tombstone but, blast it all, you always drags me into it."

Sleepy stopped for lack of breath and glared at Hashknife.

"Yes sir," nodded Hashknife slowly, "just suppose you was a brother to that girl. It's thirty miles; which is some ride in the dark."

"Hey!" yelled Skelton from the kitchen. "You jaspers like gravy with your spuds?"

"You spoke my daily prayer," yelled Hashknife.

Sleepy got to his feet and stretched his arms.

"I hope that train don't get in so early that we'll have to hold up Spot Easton on the road. I had a sister, Hashknife, and I know what you mean."

IT WAS nine o'clock when Hashknife and Sleepy rode into Gunsight, and the night was as dusky as the proverbial black cat. Gunsight was quite a bit larger than Caldwell and a trifle more modern, owing to the railroad which made it a shipping point for the surrounding country.

They dismounted at a hitch-rack and tied their horses.

"Mister Easton will likely put his horse in a stable," stated Hashknife. "Especially if he aims to drive back tonight. We better kinda examine the livery-stable."

They jingled their spurs down the sidewalk to where a lantern swung over a wide doorway, from within which came the unmistakable odor of a stable. Two more lighted lanterns were hung at the sides of the room to light up the rows of stalls.

A stable-man came out of the grain-room carrying another lantern which he placed on a backless chair near the door, and squinted at Hashknife and Sleepy.

"Evenin'," he grunted. Cowboys usually made the stable their headquarters.

"Evenin'," greeted Hashknife. "How's business?"

"'S'all right, I reckon. The day man got drunk and I'm doin' two shifts. Got any Durham?"

Hashknife passed him part of a sack and he rolled a cigaret.

"Ain't much night business, is there?" asked Hashknife.

"Naw—not much; but just enough to make me miss a date with m' girl. Figured to close up early, but a feller drove in a while ago, and he's goin' out agin' tonight. Naturally I've got to linger around here 'till he starts travelin' agin'. I ain't no drinkin' person, but whisky sure does cause me a lot of misery."

"Can't he hitch his own horse?" asked Hashknife.

"Well, I reckon he could; but it ain't hardly good business to ask a feller to pay fer service and not git it."

"That's a fact," agreed Hashknife solemnly. "We was just wonderin' if we could bunk in the hay t'night. I don't admire to pay a hotel four-bits for a chance to read my shirt the next mornin'."

"Sure, sure. The loft's got plenty of room, or you can sleep in the grain-room. They's a bunk in there and some blankets."

"That's right kind of you," said Hashknife. "If we can help you— Say, if it ain't too late to keep that date with your girl——"

"Whatcha mean?"

"Well, is there any reason why I can't tend to that feller's horse? Ain't no trouble to cinch a hull on a bronc. Course I wouldn't take his money——"

"Thassall right, I got his money in advance. It ain't no saddle-horse, though. If you don't mind hitchin' a horse to a buggy——"

"Cinch," grunted Hashknife. "Show me the horse and buggy, pardner."

It took the man about a minute to point out the horse, harness and buggy. It was the tall, bay horse which Easton had driven from Caldwell. The stable-man was voluble in his thanks, and hurried away to keep his date. Hashknife and Sleepy grinned at each other as they sat down to wait for Easton's return.

BLONDY HAGEN, following his run-in with Hashknife and Sleepy, had come to Gunsight. His head was still sore from its crash against the War-Bonnet bar, and he proceeded to embalm his wounded feelings in very bad whisky.

And when Blondy got drunk, he got bad. Like an Indian warrior he sang his own praises—until he saw Spot Easton drive in and stable his horse. Blondy was not afraid of Spot—not in the least, but he knew that Spot would have something to say about what happened in the War-Bonnet.

Blondy was one of those peculiar characters whose gun was always ready for hire, and he could still feel the weight of Spot Easton's cash. He really wanted to see Spot and, if possible, get more money; but he felt that he really should do something to earn what he had already been paid.

He weaved out of the Ten-Spot saloon and balanced himself against a porch-post. Just to his left was a hitch-rack, partly lighted from the Ten-Spot window. He clung to the post and puzzled over the two horses, which looked familiar. Suddenly he remembered; and the memory caused him to straighten up and grunt softly to himself—

"Tha's their broncs! Whatcha know?"

Blondy gawped foolishly and grew inspired. It might be worth his while to find Spot Easton and tell him that those two gall-laden punchers were in Gunsight. He lurched away from the post and proceeded to cut himself a wide trail down the sidewalk. He hadn't the slightest idea where Spot Easton might be found; but Blondy hadn't the slightest idea where he was going; so it made no difference.

He almost fell into the doorway of a restaurant as a man was coming out—and the man was Easton. He grabbed Blondy by the shoulder to keep him from falling, and shut the door behind him. Blondy got a glimpse of a very pretty girl sitting at a table; and then Spot Easton shoved him past the restaurant and into the darkness of an alley.

"What are you doin' here, Hagen?" demanded Easton.

"Me? Leggo that arm! Whatcha think you are?"

"You know who I am," growled Easton meaningly. "When did you come to Gunsight?"

"Thassall right," said Blondy drunkenly. "Don't paw me 'round, Spot. I was looking fer you. Mebbe you'd like to know that them two Tombstone punchers are here."

"Who?"

"You know; them two that kinda jiggered our play."

"Oh!" Easton grunted softly. "What are they doin' here?"

"I never seen 'em," admitted Blondy, "but their broncs are tied to the rack at the Ten-Spot, y'betcha."

"Are you sure, Hagen?"

"Betcha I am. I know that tall roan and the blue-gray."

Spot Easton thought rapidly. If Hashknife and Sleepy were in Gunsight, they had a reason for coming—and he might be the reason. He suddenly realized that they had opened and read that letter, and he swore softly for not having thought of that before.

"Are they in the Ten-Spot?" he asked.

"Wasn't," Hagen replied. "I come out of there and found the horses."

"The Ten-Spot is almost straight across the street from the livery-stable," mused Easton aloud. "I wonder if they—Hagen, is there another livery-stable here?"

"Uh-huh. 'Soapy' Evans owns kind of a stable."

"You want to earn your money, Hagen?"

"Tha's me."

"Go up to the livery-stable and find out if them two snake-hunters are there. Don't let 'em see you; do you understand?"

"Prob'ly git killed, if I don't," grunted Hagen. "Where'll I find you?"

"I'll be right here waitin' for you."

It was about two blocks to the stable, and the average was about six saloons to a block. Hagen knew that he had won back the good graces of his employer; so he went in and partook of good cheer. Easton fretted in the dark and waited for a report, while Hagen weaved in and out of the saloons; getting closer to the stable at each entrance and exit, but also getting more cocksure of himself.

The last saloon took away every vestige of cowardice in Blondy Hagen's make-up. He came out, balanced on the edge of the sidewalk, while he filled his lungs to capacity and then emitted a war-whoop that would have shamed any Indian on earth.

He stumbled off the sidewalk, gripped his six-shooter tightly, took his bearings

from the lantern over the doorway of the stable and set sail.

He stumbled up the plank drive-way and into the dim light of the stable, telling himself hoarsely how very great he was and how Spot Easton depended upon him for everything. As he halted to inhale enough breath for another declaration, a rope seemed to descend from nowhere, tightened around his arms and body, and something threw him upside down with a great crash.

Strong hands picked him up and carried him away, and a moment later he felt himself hurled into space. He landed on something fairly soft, while above him came the crash of a closing door and the rasp of a padlock-hasp.

Hagen staggered to his feet and his head came in violent contact with the roof, and he sat down again. After much painful effort he secured a match and inspected his position. He peered all around, felt of his empty holster, and cursed wickedly when the match burnt his finger.

"I'm in the oat-bin," he told himself, "an' I ain't got no gun. Tha's pe-culiar, but 's a fac'."

And Blondy Hagen settled down in the oats and went to sleep, while Spot Easton cursed savagely and wondered if Hagen had run foul of those two unmentionable cowboys.

HE HAD told Jane Lee that he was going to the livery-stable to get the horse and buggy. Peeking into the restaurant window he saw that she was nervously waiting his return. He prided himself on the fact that he had made an impression on her already and he knew that—well, he owned Lonesome Lee, and the girl did not know any one in Lodge-Pole county.

Hagen had had time to make several trips to the stable by this time. Easton began to worry. Finally he decided to take a chance. He hurried back into the restaurant.

"Just run into a feller who talked business, and it delayed me," he explained. "I reckon you might as well come along with me as to stay here."

He picked up her valise and led the way out to the street.

"It's only a little ways," he assured her, as he switched the valise to his left hand and slid his gun loose. "She's a nice night."

A cowboy came out of a saloon, braced his legs wide apart, whooped loudly and emptied his gun in the air. The girl drew back in affright, but Easton laughed and assured her that the shots meant nothing.

"You're goin' to like this country after you get used to it, Jane."

"I—I suppose so," she faltered. "It is all so new to me, and the houses seem so small."

Easton said nothing. They walked up the sloping sidewalk to the door of the stable and stopped. There was not a sound from the interior, except horses munching hay.

Easton looked up and down the street. He could see the hitch-rack in front of the Ten-Spot, but was unable to distinguish the color of the horses.

"Hey!" he called. There was no response. "I suppose I'll have to harness my own horse," he said to the girl.

He placed the valise on the floor and walked slowly inside. The door of the grain-room was partly open, and he peered in.

Came the dull *chuck!* of a muffled blow and Easton disappeared inside. The girl was watching him, and wondered how he had managed to get inside by dragging both feet.

From inside the room came a creaking noise and a crash, as if a bin-cover had been slammed down. Then the door opened and Hashknife and Sleepy stepped out.

"Howdy, ma'am," said Hashknife politely. "Are you Miss Lee?"

"Why, yes. I—I—where is Mr. Easton?"

"Easton? O-o-o-oh, yeah. He's in the oat-bin, ma'am."

"I do not understand you." The girl seemed puzzled.

"Harness the horse, Sleep," commanded Hashknife. "This lady's got to find a place to sleep."

Sleepy gleefully brought out the horse and backed it into the buggy-shafts. Jane Lee stared at the tall cowboy beside her, and wondered at the mystery of it all.

"You drive the rig, Sleep," ordered Hashknife. "I'll bring your bronc along with me."

"But," objected the girl, "I—I—Mr. Easton is going to take me to my father's ranch."

"Was," corrected Hashknife. "He's goin' to sleep with one of his hired men tonight, so we made him let us take you home."

Hashknife shoved the valise into the rear of the buggy and helped her into the seat. She started to protest, but Sleepy chirped to the tall, bay horse and they rolled hollowly out of the doorway and headed homeward.

As Hashknife crossed to the horses, the stable-man came from down the street and went into the stable. He had seen the top-buggy going up the street, and he surmized that its owner had returned.

As he turned to go toward the rear he heard a muffled voice calling. He listened closely and decided that it came from the grain-room. He sneaked in and lighted a match. Some one was hammering on the inside of the oat-bin. The stable-man was taking no chances. He went outside, got a lantern, which he hung over the top of the bin, took an old shot-gun from behind the door and flipped the fastener loose from the lid of the bin.

A moment later the lid lifted and Spot Easton, very much disheveled, stood up and blinked foolishly.

"Wh-whatcha doin' in my oats?" grunted the stableman hoarsely.

"Aw! —— you and your oats!" groaned Spot, as he crawled painfully over the edge and rubbed his sore head.

He looked back inside and motioned to the stable-man to look. Cautiously the man looked down at the sleeping form of Blondy Hagen.

"This," said the stable-man seriously, "this here is my-steer-i-us, by——"

"Where did they go? asked Easton, rubbing his head, on which appeared to be a bump about the size and shape of an egg. "Did you see the lady?"

"Was there a lady?"

"You —— fool!" exploded Easton. "I brought a lady here with me; *sabe?* I came to get that horse and buggy I left here."

The stable-man stepped outside and glanced across at the empty stall.

"The horse and buggy is gone," he announced. "If you know where you left the lady, you might look and see if she's still there or not."

But Easton exploded a number of vile epithets and staggered away down the street. The stable-man went back, looked at Blondy Hagen, blew out the lantern and went outside and shoved the sliding-doors together.

"Too —— much hocus-pocus to suit me!" he grunted, and went home.

IT WAS in the small hours of the morning when Mrs. Frosty Snow awoke from a troubled sleep—wherein she had fired Swede Sam in three languages—and sat up in bed. Frosty was on a cattle-buying trip, and Mrs. Snow was all alone in the ranch-house.

Some one was knocking urgently on the front door. She crawled out of bed, picked up a heavy Colt six-shooter, and padded her way to the front door.

"Who's there?" she asked.

"This is Hashknife Hartley, Mrs. Snow."

"Kinda early, ain't you?"

"Yes'm," admitted Hashknife, "it is early. Can I talk to you."

"If you don't mind strainin' your voice through the door."

"I don't mind," Hashknife laughed softly. "But this has got to be confidential, Mrs. Snow. It's about a girl."

"Thasso?" Mrs. Snow's voice was a trifle sarcastic. "I ain't in the habit of bein' woke up at four o'clock to pass out advice to the love-lorn, Mr. Hartley."

"Listen, ma'am," begged Hashknife. "This ain't nothin' matrimonial—honest to gosh. You know Spot Easton?"

"By sight and smell," she replied. Spot Easton's perfumery was not at all popular with the range folk.

"He lied to a girl," stated Hashknife softly. "I done stole the girl from him, and I've gotta have somebody to take care of her for a while."

"Well, why didn't you say so?" demanded Mrs. Snow, opening the door about four inches. "Where is she? Tell me about her."

Hashknife swiftly recounted what he knew about the girl, and about the situation at the 88 ranch.

"Bring her in," ordered Mrs. Snow. "I'll sure take care of her and nobody's goin' to know where she is. Prob'ly end up in a killin', but that ain't my affair. Say you're livin' at the Tombstone ranch? Yeah, that danged Swede came back."

Hashknife went back to the dim outlines of a horse and buggy and returned in a moment with Jane Lee and Sleepy. After thirty miles in a top-buggy, with a companion who only talked in monosyllables, Jane Lee was more than willing to stay any

place. She did not have the slightest idea of what it was all about. It was not like the reception she had expected. In fact, it was like a nightmare.

"Just edge to one side, while she comes in," ordered Mrs. Snow. "Frosty Snow's old woman is kind of in the rough at this time o' day."

Jane Lee walked in and Mrs. Snow closed the door to a few inches.

"Come agin, cowboys."

"Yes'm, y'betcha," laughed Hashknife, and the two men clumped down the steps and back to their horses and buggy, while Mrs. Snow put her arms around Jane Lee.

"Whatcha cryin' for?" demanded Mrs. Snow. "My gosh, you're all right, honey."

"I—I don't know what it is all about," sobbed Jane. "I don't know what became of Mr. Easton, and——"

"Don'tcha worry about that sidewinder," Mrs. Snow said soothingly. "You brace up and quit worryin'. Mebbe it was danged lucky them two punchers kidnaped you, honey."

"But why did they?" demanded Jane with some heat.

"Didn't you ask 'em?"

"Dozens of times. The one who drove the horse wouldn't tell me anything. He kept singing something about being buried on the lone prairie."

Mrs. Snow laughed and patted Jane on the shoulder.

"You brace up, honey. You're danged lucky to ride all the way from Gunsight with a mournful cowpuncher, if you only knowed it. You snap into a nightgown and pile into my bed, and I'll bet you'll feel better. We're common folks here at the Half-Moon, and, outside of havin' an imported cook, we don't put on much dog."

"I suppose," said Jane softly, "I should be thankful that I am here with you."

"Yes, and you don't know half of it, little lady."

HASHKNIFE and Sleepy took the horse and buggy back to Caldwell, and tied the horse to the rack beside the livery-stable. No one saw them come, and no one saw them leave, except one or two dogs, which barked sleepily.

They rode back to the Tombstone ranch, and stabled their horses just as the first light of dawn showed over the eastern hills.

They stopped in the porch of the ranch-house as the sound of galloping horses came to their ears, and saw two riders swing around the bend, riding swiftly toward Caldwell. One rider was a little in the rear, and in the dim light he seemed to be a trifle unsteady in his saddle.

"Somebody unlocked the oat-bin," laughed Hashknife softly, "and the blood-hounds are on the trail of a top-buggy."

"They're welcome to it," yawned Sleepy. "Hope I never have to ride that far in one again. I sung all the time to kinda keep things cheerful."

"My ——!" gasped Hashknife. "The poor girl!"

Spot Easton rode all the way from Gunsight with a blind, unreasoning rage in his heart. It had taken him quite a while to arouse the other stable-man in order to hire a saddle-horse, and then he had gone back to the oat-bin and made Blondy Hagen ride with him.

He did not have the slightest idea which way the horse and buggy had gone, until he rode into Caldwell and found it hitched outside the livery-stable. Hagen was still too drunk and sleepy to care how Easton felt, and listened indifferently while Easton polluted the morning air with profanity.

"'F I stole a horsh 'n buggy, I'd git hung," stated Blondy knowingly.

"And that's no —— lie, either!" snapped Easton. "Come on."

Blondy followed him down to Jake Blue's office, Easton hammered on the door with the toe of his boot. In a few moments Jake's tousled head appeared and he demanded to know what in the adjective did anybody mean by waking him up in the middle of the night.

Rapidly, and with many oaths, Easton explained that Hashknife and Sleepy had stolen his horse and buggy at Gunsight.

"Thasso?" Blue shivered slightly. "Got any idea where they went with it?"

"Brought it here!" snapped Easton. "It's tied to the livery-stable hitch-rack."

"Then it ain't stole a-tall." Blue seemed relieved over this statement.

"They stole it from me!" yowled Easton. "I tell you they hit me on the head and threw me into a —— oat-bin!"

"Thasso," nodded Blondy seriously. "I know, because I was in there, too."

Blue started to laugh, but managed to choke it back. It was no place to laugh, and yet he howled inwardly at the thought

of Easton and Hagen being thrown into an oat-bin.

"I want you to arrest the both of 'em on a charge of horse stealin'," demanded Easton angrily, "and if you think there's anything funny about it—go ahead and laugh."

Blue grew serious. He did not relish the idea of going out to arrest those two men on such a serious charge.

"Are you sure they was the ones?" he asked. "Can you git up in court and swear that they stole your horse and buggy?"

"I'm —— 'f I can," said Hagen. "All I knows——"

"Of course I can swear to it!" snapped Easton. "Do you think I'd get up there and admit that I didn't know who done it?"

"If I had a good deputy-sheriff—" Blue expressed his thoughts in words.

"Take Hagen with you, Jake."

"Like ——!" exploded Hagen. "No sir! I ain't——"

"Since when did you break away from us?" queried Spot meaningly.

"Oh, awright. I ain't breakin' away from nobody, Spot; but when you monkey with them two jaspers there's a hoo-doo on the job, I tell you. If you lemme try agin' with the long-range stuff——"

"And miss again," sneered Easton. "All the good that's done is to make old Skelton more careful."

"We ain't had much luck, tha's a fact," said Jake Blue sadly. "Mebbe we went at it all wrong."

"You can't expect a fortune to come along and roost in your lap, can you?" asked Easton sneeringly. "We'll get these two punchers into jail and then we'll settle with old man Skelton."

"If we'd only tried to buy the —— place at first," argued Blue.

"Well, we didn't!"

"It was your idea to make old Skelton sick of his place, so's he'd be willin' to sell cheap."

"Yeah? How did I know that he was going to hang on in spite of everything? I done the best I could."

"I reckon so, Spot. Doc Clevis tried to buy it agin' from Skelton and the old son-of-a-gun made him a price this time."

"How much, Jake?"

"Hundred thousand dollars."

"That," said Hagen seriously, "is more'n it's worth."

"Aw, ——!" exploded Easton. "If you're tryin' to be funny, Hagen——"

"Well, ain't it?" wailed Hagen.

Easton turned back to Blue.

"You slam them two jaspers into jail right away," he said. "If you need more help I can send in some of the boys from the 88."

"All right," Blue said dubiously. "You go and sleep f'r an hour or so, Hagen. This ain't no blear-eyed job, y'betcha."

"Make it longer'n that if you feel like it," agreed Hagen. "Make it a week, and see if I git impatient."

Easton and Hagen went back up the street toward the War-Bonnet. It was too early for Caldwell to be awake, and Easton wondered what old Lonesome Lee was doing out so early in the morning.

The old man was standing in front of the Paris restaurant, and for the first time in months he seemed to be sober.

"What in —— are you doing around so early?" questioned Easton as they came up to the old man.

"Just lookin' around, thassall," Lonesome Lee's voice was very husky, but there was no trace of drunkeness left.

"Lookin' around, eh? What for?"

"Just for instance." The old man was a trifle belligerent.

This attitude did not please Spot Easton. He much preferred to have the old man whining for liquor.

"What's biting you?" he snapped.

"Not a danged thing, Spot. I'm sober today, if you take notice, and I'm lookin' for a letter I lost."

"Letter?" echoed Easton. "What letter?"

"I was drunk," continued the old man, "but I wasn't so drunk that I didn't know about that letter. Somehow I remember you tellin' me about other letters, Spot—letters that you wrote. I've been a —— old drunken bum, but I'm sober right now and I want to know a few things."

"That must 'a' been the letter that the long cowboy had," said Blondy unthinkingly.

Easton shot Blondy a withering glance and turned back to Lonesome.

"I dunno what you're talking about, Lee."

"I remember the tall cowboy," muttered Lonesome. "He was a stranger. But you got the letter, Spot."

Spot Easton's hand went mechanically to his ear as he shook his head.

"No, I'm —— if I did! You ask Windy

who got that letter. Come on and let's have a drink, Lonesome."

Lonesome shook his head slowly, licked his lips and walked away. Easton glared after him and turned to Hagen:

"Will you ever learn to keep your danged tongue out of my affairs? Ain't you got sense enough to let me do the talkin'? Now, that —— old fool will likely talk to everybody and—aw, ——! I hope you and Jake Blue will get your men today. I don't want Lonesome Lee to talk to Hashknife. It may take a killin' to prevent it."

"You don't let me in on anythin'," complained Blondy bitterly. "You talk about letters and cattle-brands and the Tombstone ranch, and you never let me know the why of anythin'. All I'm good fer is to bush-whack somebody."

"You get paid for it, don't you?" demanded Easton.

"Yeah, I get paid for it."

"Then keep your mouth shut, Hagen. The less you know the safer you are—*sabe?* It'll pay you to keep still."

IT WAS about noon when Hashknife and Sleepy woke up. Bliz Skelton was cooking breakfast for them and, though evidently curious, he asked no questions of what happened the night before.

"I went up to Caldwell last night," he volunteered. "Ain't been up there at night for a dog's age, 'cause it wasn't noways safe for me to be on the road after dark."

"Any excitement?" yawned Hashknife, as he tugged at a tight boot.

"No-o-o," Skelton twisted his face away from the spattering bacon. "Doc Clevis offered to buy this ranch again. A few weeks ago he offered me eight thousand, but last night he made it nine. Got kinda ruffed 'cause I wouldn't take his offer."

"You've had other offers, ain't you?" asked Sleepy.

"Yeah. Spot Easton offered me seventy-five hundred."

"That don't noways include the stock, does it?" queried Hashknife.

"No. Just the ranch-house and what fenced ground goes with it. When Spot made that offer I reckon I had about seven hundred head of 33 cows on this range, but right now a 33 critter is as scarce as vi'lets in Jan'wary."

"Well, gee cripes!" exploded Hashknife, stamping his feet on the floor. "You mean to stand there and tell me that you let somebody run off all your stock?"

"Well, I—I didn't 'let' 'em, Hashknife. 'Pears that you don't have to let folks rustle your cows."

"Ain't you complained none?"

"Who'd I complain to?"

"That's a question," admitted Hashknife. "I reckon you'll just about have to sell out, Bliz."

"—— if I will! No gosh danged bunch of——"

Bliz let loose of his skillet and grabbed his short shot-gun from its rack beside the door. Some one had ridden up to the porch, and now was coming up the steps to the door.

Bliz stepped back out of line with the door and motioned to Sleepy to open it. Some one knocked loudly. Sleepy grasped the knob and drew the door open, keeping himself behind it, while Jake Blue and Blondy Hagen stood there and blinked into the muzzle of Skelton's riot-gun and wished they had postponed their visit.

"Put dud-down that gun," stuttered Blue, trying to force himself to be brave. "You—you——"

Blondy Hagen's hands went up above his head, and he squinted dismally. His heart was not in this job at all.

"Whatcha want here, Blue?" asked Skelton.

Jake Blue tore his eyes away from the menacing gun barrels and squinted at Hashknife and Sleepy.

"I want them two," he replied. "I've got warrants for their arrest for horse-stealin'."

He started to reach for his pocket, but changed his mind. Such a move might be suicide. Hashknife walked over to the door and looked at Blue.

"Who swore out that warrant, sheriff?"

"Spot Easton."

"Yeah?" Hashknife seemed greatly amused. "You go back and tell Spot Easton to come and get us, will you?"

"I'm the sheriff!" snapped Blue.

"That's sure a deplorable fact," agreed Hashknife, "and one of the main reasons why we refuse to get ourselves arrested. We'd have a sweet time ever gettin' out of jail, whether we were innocent or guilty."

"If you could prove—" began Blue, but Hashknife interrupted him.

"Prove it? Why, we'd have a fine chance.

I suppose we'd have to stay in jail until the first term of court, eh?"

"Unless the judge would turn you loose."

"Judge Pelley'd jist about do that," grunted Skelton. "He knows about as much law as my old pinto horse, and he'd send his mother to jail for a quart of booze. Him and Spot Easton are thicker'n thieves."

"I've got to do m' duty," wailed Blue. "I ain't noways responsible for what Judge Pelley would do, am I? You're resistin' an officer of the law, if you only know it."

"Ain't nobody resisted you—yet," Hashknife reminded him softly, "but if you don't crawl to your horses and rattle your hocks out of here, I'll nail your pants to the floor and leave you there to starve."

"Come on," urged Hagen. "There's a difference in bein' brave and bein' a —— fool, Jake. I never knowed a two-barrel gun yet what wasn't easy on the trigger. Come on."

Hagen turned and went down the steps to his horse, flexing his tired arms as he went. Jake Blue swallowed his pride, along with a lump in his throat, and followed him down the steps.

"This ain't the last of it, y'betcha," he called back to the open doorway. "There's more'n one count agin' you now."

Skelton stepped out on the porch and pointed to where the road wound around the point of a hill.

"Speakin' of counts, Jake; there's just twenty goin' to be said by me. If you ain't around that corner——"

Twenty counts is a short time; but Jake Blue and Blondy Hagen beat it by four. It was an ignominious retreat, especially for Jake Blue, who had a reputation to sustain, but he was wise enough to go while the going was good.

Skelton turned to go into the door, but stopped and stared at the man who was standing at the corner of the house.

"Lonesome Lee!" he grunted. "Whatcha doin' there?"

"Waitin' for Jake Blue and Hagen to pull out," replied Lonesome, and came up to Skelton.

"How'd you come, Lonesome?"

"Walked. I side-tracked for Jake and Blondy."

"Well," Skelton scratched his head and looked up at Sleepy and Hashknife, who were standing in the doorway. "Well, this seems kinda queer t' me."

Lonesome looked up at Hashknife.

"I reckon you're the man I wanted to see. 'Member me havin' a letter the other day?"

Hashknife nodded.

"I—I kinda wanted to know what was in it," said Lonesome slowly. "I sobered up 'specially for——"

Came the whining *pluk!* of a bullet and Lonesome Lee jerked back a half-step, threw one hand to his face and buckled forward at the knees.

Hashknife dove forward, grasped the old man in his arms and fairly fell through the doorway with him. Another bullet bit into the door-casing, and Skelton and Sleepy dove in behind Hashknife. Another bullet *pinged* in through the door and ricocheted off the cook-stove before Skelton kicked the door shut.

Hashknife picked Lonesome Lee off the floor and laid him on the bed. The old man's face was a mass of gore and he was cursing wickedly, deliriously; fighting to get back to his feet.

"Like a chicken with its head cut plumb off!" gasped Sleepy.

"Lay still!" snapped Hashknife, dodging Lonesome's kicking legs. "That bullet knocked, but didn't come in."

"Creased?" queried Sleepy anxiously, as he grasped Lonesome by the legs.

Lonesome ceased kicking, but his flow of profanity was undiminished. Skelton brought the water-bucket and a towel and washed the blood off the old man's face. The bullet had cut a furrow from just above his right eye to a spot over his ear and, in the passing, it had flicked a notch in the top of the ear. The wound was superficial, but the shock was considerable.

He sat up and looked foolishly around, while Skelton mopped off the gore.

"Wh-what happened?" he croaked.

Hashknife examined the wound and turned quickly to Skelton.

"You patch him up, Bliz," he said. "He'll likely have a sore head, but that won't hurt him. Me and Sleepy are goin' to Caldwell."

Hashknife was half-way out of the door at the finish of his statement and heading for the stable. Sleepy gawped for a moment and trotted after him. They saddled swiftly and galloped out to the Caldwell road.

"Whatcha goin' to Caldwell for?" asked Sleepy, as they hit a level stretch and shook up their mounts.

"They'll arrest us sure as ——, Hashknife."

"Thasso?"

Hashknife spat out a half-burned cigaret and pulled his hat lower over his eyes.

"I'm plumb tired of bein' shot at, Sleepy."

IT WAS about three miles to Caldwell, and they covered the distance in record speed. At the War-Bonnet hitch-rack they dismounted and went into the big saloon. There was no sign of Jake Blue or Blondy Hagen.

Windy, the bartender, gaped at the sight of them and upset some glasses on the backbar with his elbows.

"Seen Jake Blue lately?" asked Hashknife.

"Nope."

"Where's Spot Easton?"

"Dunno."

Hashknife leaned on the bar and studied Windy closely.

"You don't know very much, do you?"

"If I did," said Windy slowly, "I wouldn't be a bartender. I didn't lie about not knowin' where Spot Easton is, but Jake Blue and Blondy Hagen went through here a short time ago, headin' for the 88."

"Goin' after help, eh?"

"Mm-m-m."

Hashknife considered this. It was going to be very awkward if the sheriff brought the gang from the 88 outfit to help him serve the warrants.

"How many punchers on the 88?" he asked.

"Seven, I reckon."

"That makes nine, countin' Blue and Hagen. Odd number, ain't it? Wish it was ten."

"For gosh sake, why?" grunted Windy.

"I hate to fight odd numbers," said Hashknife seriously. "Kinda hoodoos me."

"Tryin' to kid me?" asked Windy.

"If you think so, come with 'em. Didja hear about Lonesome Lee gettin' killed?"

Lonesome Lee! Whatcha mean?"

"Somebody shot him on Skelton's porch a while ago."

"Kill him dead?"

"Didja ever know a feller to get hit with a .30-30 and fail to grab a harp?"

"Whatcha know?" grunted Windy. "Who'd kill him?"

"Come on, Sleepy."

Hashknife strode back to the door and headed for their horses. They rode swiftly back toward the Tombstone ranch, with Sleepy demanding to know what in —— they ever made the trip to Caldwell for, and what good it was going to do?

"Elimination and instruction, Sleepy," replied Hashknife, as they dismounted at the Tombstone corral.

"I had an idea that Hagen and Blue might 'a' stopped and took a shot at Lonesome Lee; but they wouldn't 'a' had time to circle back and still go through Caldwell much ahead of us. I was also kinda anxious to find out how many men Blue was goin' to bring back with him."

"—— of a lot of good that'll do us," complained Sleepy, "except to know that we died fightin'. I'm sure ready and willin' to pull out of Lodge-Pole county."

They found Lonesome and Skelton discussing cattle over their pipes. Lonesome was not much the worse for his wound. Skelton had used up every available rag on the ranch to check the bleeding, and Lonesome's head looked like a turban.

"What kind of a bunch are workin' on the 88?" asked Hashknife abruptly.

"What kind?" Lonesome cogitated deeply.

"Not much good, I reckon. None of my old gang are there."

"Easton fired 'em, eh?"

Lonesome nodded slowly and wearily.

"I reckon so. He got a bunch from Arizona. I dunno anythin' wrong about any of 'em, but I know I wouldn't want that kind of punchers working for me. A feller by the name of Dell Blackwood is his foreman and he——"

"That's a plenty," interrupted Hashknife. "I know that horse-thief. Me and him worked on the Hashknife outfit and I know him from the belt both ways. Betcha he's got 'Holy Moses' Herman workin' for him."

"There is a Herman," nodded Lonesome. "Short feller, with a big nose."

"That's him!" exclaimed Hashknife. "Ought to 'a' been hung fifteen years before he got old enough to wear long pants. Say, how much of the 88 does Easton own?"

"I dunno. He kinda took charge, and—and——"

"You mean he's kept you drunk for a year or two and jist kinda nudged you out of everythin'. Shot your nerve all to —— with hooch, and hoodled you out of every thing you own."

Lonesome stared down at the floor, but said nothing.

"Has he got a bill of sale from you?"

"I don't know," admitted Lonesome. "If he did, he got it from me when I was drunk."

"And he could 'a' got it from you any old time durin' the last year or so," declared Hashknife, " 'cause you ain't been sober in all that time."

"What business is it of yours?" demanded Lonesome angrily. "It's my ranch?"

"What about Jane Lee?"

Lonesome jerked upright and stared open-mouthed at Hashknife.

"Jane?" he croaked. "What—who——"

Lonesome Lee spluttered over his own words, his hand trembled wildly as he tried to grasp Hashknife.

"Set down!" snapped Hashknife. "She ain't far from here, but I'm danged 'f she's goin' to see you in the shape you are now, old timer. She thinks you're a dandy old dad, instead of a broken old wreck. She thinks you own the 88. You're a —— of a nice specimen for a young lady to pick out for a dad, ain'tcha?"

Lonesome bowed his sore old head on his hands and wept, while he swore feelingly at himself.

"You ought t' have a gizzard," said Hashknife, "and then you could eat with the chickens."

"I betcha," sobbed Lonesome. "I got it all comin' to me, young feller. Don't talk soft on my account."

"All right," grinned Hashknife. "I'll try and say somethin' mean to yuh. Can't remember givin' Easton a bill of sale, eh?"

"No."

Sleepy got up, and going over to a rear window, peered out, then drew back quickly.

"Here they come!" he said softly. "The whole —— works!"

Hashknife looked around quickly.

"Got a cellar, Skelton?"

"—— right I have!"

Skelton hopped across the floor and lifted his table away from a trap-door. This he raised.

"Git down in there, Lonesome," ordered Hashknife, "and don't make a noise; *sabe?* Don't ask questions!"

Lonesome went down the short ladder, and the trap was closed and covered with the table, just as a crowd of men, led by Jake Blue, rode up to the front door.

Hashknife and Sleepy had closed the door as they came in, and now Skelton slipped the bar into place and picked up his shotgun.

"Come on," whispered Hashknife. "We'll go out the back window, Sleepy. Don't make any resistance, Skelton. Put down the shotgun and act natural."

He and Sleepy slid out the back window, and shut it behind them, just as some one knocked loudly on the front door.

They went cautiously around the house, walking sidewise, with their backs against the wall.

" 'Bout a dozen of 'em," warned Sleepy, but Hashknife gave his warning no heed.

They could hear Jake Blue questioning Skelton, and the murmur of other voices.

"Where's the dead man?" It was Doc Clevis' voice.

"I dunno what you're talkin' about," replied Skelton.

Hashknife peered around the corner and stepped out, with Sleepy beside him. Jake Blue and Doc Clevis were on the porch arguing through the open door with Skelton, while the rest of the men were still mounted. The nearest man to them was a grim-faced person, with a heavy red mustache. Just beyond him was a heavy-set cowboy, with an enormous nose.

"Horse-thieves from the Hashknife!" snorted Hashknife loudly.

Every one turned quickly, and just as quickly they realized their disadvantage. Hashknife was standing with his legs far apart, his right hand resting on his hip just over the top of his holstered gun, while Sleepy stood with one elbow braced against the house and his hand swaying over the butt of his Colt.

"Don't move, Blue," cautioned Hashknife. "You and Doc just hold that pose or the picture is spoiled."

Hashknife did not seem to look at them as he spoke, but watched the two mounted men nearest him.

"Blackwood and Holy Moses," grinned Hashknife.

Blackwood moistened his lips.

"You!" he grunted with a great effort. "I didn't know it was you."

"Danged right you didn't," agreed Hashknife. "If you did, you and that elephant-nosed horse-thief over there would 'a' fogged for Canada."

"Thasso?" retorted the big-nosed cowboy,

and cleared his throat with great difficulty.

Hashknife appeared to size up the rest of the crowd.

"I dunno the rest of you, gentlemen, but your in danged bad comp'ny."

"You two are under arrest," declared Blue loudly,"and we want Lonesome Lee's body."

"You don't need to watch these two," stated Skelton from the doorway, indicating Blue and the doctor. Skelton had them covered with his double-barreled shot-gun.

"You're under arrest, too!" wailed Blue nervously. "Better submit quietly if you know what's good fer you."

The big-nosed cowboy must have thought that the Sheriff's discourse had drawn Hashknife's attention, because he whirled quickly in his saddle.

Hashknife's right hand flicked down and up, and Blackwood flung himself forward to be out of line with the bullet that hissed past him and thudded into the big-nosed one. The latter's pistol discharged and broke a window. He jerked back, swayed sidewise and fell out of his saddle, while his horse whirled, kicked at the falling man, and trotted toward the gate.

"Oh, the —— fool!" complained Blackwood bitterly. "If he didn't know Hashknife Hartly— Gawd!"

The shooting had unnerved Blackwood.

"You seen how it was done, didn't you Blue?" asked Hashknife softly. "He went for his gun."

"By ——!" swore Blue savagely. "Can't ten of us take two men?"

"Hop to it," said Hashknife. "Ain't no reason why you can't try it."

"Count me out," said Blackwood quickly. "I sure as —— ain't lost neither of 'em."

He turned his horse and rode straight toward the gate and the rest of the horsemen followed him.

"Come back here and get Holy Smoke!" snapped Hashknife.

Blackwood and two of the men dismounted, and one of them put the wounded man on his saddle and rode away with him.

Blue chewed savagely on his tobacco and stared at Doc Clevis, who seemed indifferent to it all.

"Arrestin' folks ain't in my line," stated Doc, as if in self-defense. "I'm here to take charge of the body of Lonesome Lee."

"What's your line, Blue?" asked Hashknife, and the Lodge-Pole sheriff swore feelingly.

"If cussin' showed ability, you'd be Secretary of War," said Hashknife. "What's all this about Lonesome Lee bein' dead?"

"We-well!" snorted Doc Clevis wonderingly.

"He's in there," said Blue pointing into the house. "By ——; I'm goin' t' find out about things."

He brushed past Skelton, who stepped aside at a nod from Hashknife, and they all went inside. Blue and the doctor looked around. The blood-stained blanket on the bed caught Blue's eye, and he pounced on it quickly.

"Whose blood is that?" he asked triumphantly.

"You can have it, if you want it," said Hashknife.

"What'sa idea of hidin' the body?" demanded the doctor.

"Looks —— queer t' me," swore Blue meaningly. "Man gets shot and his body hid. You fellers think you can do things like that? Huh!"

"Mebbe he's already buried," suggested Hashknife. "Mebbe we dug a hole and buried him."

Blue snorted in disgust and turned toward the door, as if to go outside, but whirled like a flash, gun in hand. Skelton, who was a trifle to one side, idly swinging the shot-gun in one hand, had seen Blue's move toward his gun, and as Blue whirled, Skelton threw the heavy riot-gun straight at his head.

It was over in a second. The breech of the shot-gun crashed into Blue's face, knocking him off his feet and tossing his pistol toward the ceiling, while the shotgun slammed into the wall and sent a handful of buckshot into the floor.

"Kerzowie!" whooped Hashknife.

Doc Clevis helped Blue to his feet and led him outside to his horse. Blue did not seem to have the slightest idea of what had happened to him, although his nose had shifted from its original mooring, giving him a peculiar lop-sided, cock-eyed appearance. His right eye was also beginning to draw a dark mantle across his vision, but in spite of it all, Blue whistled through his teeth and obeyed Doc Clevis to the letter.

As they rode away Bliz Skelton shook his head and looked at Hashknife.

"It's all right so far, but this is the finish, I reckon. I don't like Blue and his gang, but they stand for the law. Everybody around here hates me, and it ain't goin' to

stretch your imagination to see that Blue will have the whole country behind him. If I was you fellers I'd saddle up and pull m' freight, *muy pronto*."

"Not yet, Bliz. Shucks," Hashknife looked solemnly at several heifers, which had drifted up past the barn and were grazing among the tombstones. "I've got business to attend to, don'tcha know it. There's——"

Hashknife stopped and squinted at a spotted yearling, which had turned broadside to him, about fifty feet away.

"You brand on the right hip, Bliz?"

"Uh-huh."

Hashknife stepped inside the house and took a coiled rope from a peg in the wall. Quickly fashioning a hondo and running out a loop, he roped the yearling, which bucked and bawled, kicking over a number of tombstones in its gyrations, while Sleepy and Hashknife dug their heels into the hard ground and held it firm.

"Mebbe I'm wrong," panted Hashknife, "but I wish you'd take a squint at that brand, Bliz."

Skelton approached the half-choked calf and squinted at the 88 on its hip.

"Nothin' but an 88 calf," he replied.

"Look closer," urged Hashknife. "See if the front halves of the 88 ain't newer burn than the other."

"By ——, it is!" exploded Skelton foolishly. "Whatcha know about that? Who in —— done that?"

"Come on and let's put the critter into the corral," ordered Hashknife.

They led it into a gate and removed the rope while the rest of the calves scattered out through the main gate and into the hills.

"That's where your calves have gone to," said Hashknife seriously. "It's a cinch to use a runnin'-iron and make 88 out of 33. Some danged cow-men ain't got sense enough to make their brand fool-proof. How long has that outfit been knowed as the 88?"

Skelton masticated rapidly for a moment.

"Since Easton's been in control, I betcha. I've hear the place spoke of as the old Cross-L outfit. That was likely Lonesome Lee's brand. We'll ask him."

Lonesome Lee came painfully and cautiously out of his hiding-place and considered Skelton's question.

"Easton bought that brand from a feller over near Ross Mountains. He drove in a hundred head of feeders which was wearin' the 88, and he—aw, I'm danged if I know what he wanted to do it for, but he rebranded all of the Cross-L stock, and cancelled my registry."

"And the 88 brand made it a cinch to steal all of Skelton's stock," said Hashknife. "All they had to do was to burn on the other half of the 88."

He took a pencil and illustrated it to Lonesome.

"I—I didn't have nothin' to do with that," wailed Lonesome. "My ——, I ain't no thief!"

"No, I don't reckon you are, Lonesome."

"I'll make it all up, Skelton," blurted Lonesome. "I sure will. I'll give him half of my own stock."

"Have you got any stock?" asked Hashknife.

Lonesome stared at the three men and turned away.

"I dunno," he said dully. "I ain't got no idea how I stand. Mebbe I've got a thousand head of cows, and if I have I'd give 'em all for just one drink of liquor."

Skelton dug under his bunk and drew out a jug and handed it to Lonesome.

"I reckon you need a shot, Lonesome. If you're goin' to do a good job of quittin', you've got to—what'sa matter?"

Lonesome turned and walked wearily to the door.

"I ain't drinkin' nothin', Skelton—not today. I've had my share."

Skelton shook his head wonderingly and replaced the jug, while Hashknife went to Lonesome and put his hand on the old man's shoulder.

"Everybody in Caldwell thinks you're dead, Lonesome. Mind keepin' out of sight for a while, and let 'em go on thinkin' that?"

"What's the idea?"

"It's like this," Hashknife wrinkled his nose away from the smoke of his cigaret. "In an honest court we could make Easton and his gang hard to catch, for rustlin', but under the present conditions it's only an excuse to kill somebody. If you can keep out of sight I'm bettin' my hunch that we can wallop —— out of that gang. I ain't no *Sherlock Holmes*, but I sure as —— have an idea.

"If you got an effect, you sure must 'a' had a cause. Know what I mean?"

Hashknife pointed at the tombstones.

"There's an effect, Lonesome."

Lonesome nodded as if only half-understanding and looked at Hashknife.

"Where's my daughter?"

"Never mind her, Lonesome. What you don't know won't hurt you, and dead men tell no tales. You're supposed to be dead, you know."

"All right. I ain't goin' to worry about her; but there's a danged lot of things I don't understand."

"We're all thataway, old-timer," said Hashknife.

NOTHING further happened that day at the Tombstone ranch. Every one kept under cover for fear of another shot from the hills. Lonesome Lee asked no more questions. He seemed to be willing to let Hashknife engineer the whole thing.

It was about eleven o'clock the next morning when Mrs. Frosty Snow drove through the big gate and uprooted several of the tombstones in her mad haste.

Hashknife met her at the door, and she fairly exploded in her eagerness to tell the latest news.

"You fellers better hit the hills!" she panted. "You're accused of kidnapin' Lonesome Lee's daughter and killin' the old man, 'cause he tried to make you give her up!"

"Whatcha know about that?" Hashknife asked with a grunt.

"Shall I bring that girl up here?" asked Mrs. Snow. "It won't take me——"

"No," Hashknife shook his head. "Leave her stay where she is, Mrs. Snow. I kinda reckoned that somethin' like this was due to happen, but it sort of makes me work faster. How soon do you reckon they'll show up here?"

"Pretty soon. Jake Blue is organizin' the whole thing, and he says he ain't takin' no chances on you gettin' away. Goin' to surround the place."

"Jake's got a lotta good ideas," said Hashknife. "If he only turned his mind to honest endeavors he'd do well and last longer."

"Well," said Mrs. Snow dubiously, as she brushed the tumbled hair from her forehead and took a deep breath, "well, I've done my darndest. If you won't run—don't mind me. Maybe you don't realize what they mean to do to you."

"Ma'am, I sure thank you a lot. If you want to bring that girl up here in about an hour, it might be kinda opportune."

"I'll bring her."

Mrs. Snow went back to her team and climbed up on the wagon-seat.

"You fellers hang onto your necks until I get back."

As she whirled her team around and drove swiftly back down the road, Hashknife turned and grinned at Sleepy and Skelton.

"Whatcha goin' to do?" blurted Skelton. "Produce the old man and the girl?"

"They're comin' in a bunch this time," observed Sleepy, "and we can't out-smart the whole danged country."

Hashknife squinted out at the tombstones and turned quickly to Skelton.

"You got any wire, Skelton?"

"Wire? Yeah, I got a big spool of small wire—smaller than bailin'-wire, if that's what you mean."

"That's the stuff, Skelton. Sleepy, you find a pick and shovel."

When the desired articles were produced, Hashknife dug four small holes; spading up the top soil on each for a space of about three feet square. He got four stakes, which he drove into the ground, and fastened a wire to each; piling the dirt to cover the stakes.

These spaded places were in a semi-circle in front of the porch, and about ten feet apart. Hashknife worked swiftly, whistling unmusically between his teeth, while Skelton and Sleepy watched him curiously. When the work was all finished, Hashknife took the wires back into the house and fastened them to a chair.

"Looney as a shepherd!" exploded Sleepy. "Can you beat that? Whatcha think you are—a medicine man?"

"Now, come on—fast!" grunted Hashknife. "Skelton, you stay here with Lonesome, and we'll try and be back ahead of the procession."

He turned and raced for the corral, still carrying the pick and shovel, while Sleepy, protesting at the top of his voice, followed. Swiftly they saddled. Hashknife mounted, holding the pick and shovel across the fork of his saddle in front of him.

"Headin' for the graveyard, Sleepy!" he yelped.

"Y'betcha," grunted Sleepy meaningly as he spurred after him.

Skelton stared open-mouthed as they galloped past the house and headed toward town. It was beyond him. He studied the four wires, shook his head, and going inside he squirted some oil into the old riot-gun That done he sat down to wait.

At the entrance to the obliterated graveyard Hashknife drew up and vaulted off his horse.

"Go to the point above that first curve, Sleepy," he ordered. "Glue your eye to the road, and when you see 'em comin'—yell like —— and come runnin'."

"Aw-w-w!" protested Sleepy disgustedly, but Hashknife, with a shovel in one hand and the pick in the other, was already through the wire fence and running toward the creek.

Sleepy yanked his horse around and rode swiftly away. Hashknife's actions left little doubt in Sleepy Stevens' mind but that he was crazy. Still, Hashknife had never failed in an emergency—yet.

Hashknife stopped near the bank of the little creek and studied the ground. The graveyard had been most thoroughly obliterated, but luckily the destroyers had only harrowed the ground where the graves had been. Hashknife was able to find the spot where the gambler, "Faro," had been buried. Barney Stout had said that Faro was buried between the other graves and the creek.

Hashknife took off his coat and began digging. It was hot work, hard work. The ground was rocky and progress was slow, and Hashknife had a horror of digging into a grave. The old pick was dull and the spring was missing in the shovel. A rocky reef impeded his progress and he was forced to dig around it.

Suddenly he dropped to his knees and began an examination which made his eyes sparkle. Every few moments his head would pop up like a prairie-dog, listening for Sleepy's yell of warning.

Then it came—the long-drawn "Yee-hoo-o-o!" cowboy yell, and he saw Sleepy riding swiftly down the side of the hill toward the road.

Hashknife sprang to his feet and ran toward the fence, drawing on his coat as he ran. He was in his saddle when Sleepy galloped up.

"Everybody in the county comin'!" panted Sleepy. "And they're sure comin' in a hurry."

"Quite an honor," laughed Hashknife, as they spurred down the road. "First time we ever had 'em all callin' on us, cowboy."

"If you can see a joke in it, —— knows I can't," grumbled Sleepy. "A big audience ain't goin' to bring no joy to my soul when I'm standin' on nothin', and lookin' up a rope."

They stabled their horses and raced for the house. Skelton met them with an unspoken question, but Hashknife only laughed and shut the door softly on the four wires.

"Lemme do the talkin'," he said, "and don't start no gun-play until I bust loose."

"Here they come!" exclaimed Sleepy, peering out of a rear window. "By cripes! They're surroundin' the place this time!"

"Wish 'em joy, Sleepy," chuckled Hashknife, licking the edge of a fresh cigaret.

"Skelton, you keep that danged riot-gun under control, will you. There's a lot of decent folks in that mob, and that thing scatters."

BEYOND a doubt this time Jake Blue was prepared to make good. He had at least fifty men in his posse, fifty hard-bitten cattlemen, who were determined to help him uphold the law. Easton's tale of the kidnaping had been substantiated by the stable-man, at Gunsight.

The reported murder of Lonesome Lee did not stir them up, as did the kidnaping, but showed a clear incentive for the murder. Spot Easton had felt perfectly safe in elaborating his story considerably. He had spoken at length on the graveyard question, which was still warm in the minds of those who had friends or relatives buried there, and it appeared that Skelton was in danger of sharing punishment with Hashknife and Sleepy.

In fact, Easton and Blue had dwelt long upon the graveyard question, and there were some in the posse in whose minds this was of more interest than kidnaping and murder. Considerable liquor had also added to the general ill-feeling.

The Tombstone ranch-house door was closed, and there was no sign of life about the place. Blue detailed twelve men to circle the place and stop any chance of escape, while the rest of them, confident in their might, rode straight to the porch. Nearly every man held a rifle in his hands,

ready for action, while Jake Blue swung onto the porch and approached the door.

Doc Clevis, Spot Easton and Blondy Hagen were in the main body of the mob, as were also Dell Blackwood and two of the boys from the 88. Blackwood's horse was at the extreme outer edge of the crowd, and Blackwood's eyes shifted around as he considered the safest way out. He knew Hashknife Hartley.

"Inside there!" yelled Blue, knocking on the door with the barrel of his rifle.

"Well, if it ain't Mr. Blue!" exclaimed Hashknife's voice. "Ain'tcha never goin' to have any sense, sheriff?"

"What do you mean?" roared Blue nervously. He did not trust Hashknife.

"Look at them four wires which runs across the porch, will you?"

Blue glanced down at the small copper wires and his eyes traveled their length. The rest of the crowd took them into consideration. A horse was standing with both front feet on one of the mounds, and its rider yanked back on the reins, half-swinging the horse around.

"We was expectin' you," stated Hashknife, "and we got all set. Now, everybody hold quiet or my pardner will slam on the battery. You came down here to kill us and, if we've got to pass out, we'll take a lot of company."

He opened the door and came out on the porch. The assembled company relaxed. They felt they were sitting over a volcano; and men do not argue in a case of that kind.

Jake Blue backed away from Hashknife, masticating rapidly, and his eyes flashed from the wires to the interior of the house, as if trying to see if it was only a bluff.

"Well," said Hashknife grimly, "we're all together, it seems."

"Do you think you can git away with this?"

Blue's voice was thin as a high violin note. Some one in the crowd laughed. Blue's nose resembled a beet, and one eye was almost swollen shut.

"I kinda thought I would," said Hashknife as he looked around at the crowd.

"Well, well! There's Mister Easton and Mister Hagen. And there's my old friend, Doc Clevis. I was afraid they'd disappoint me. If there ain't Dell Blackwood! My, my! The devil must be gittin' a laugh out of this."

Those indicated shifted nervously. They had no idea of what was to come next, but they were afraid to force the issue. Hashknife singled out a respectable-looking cowman and spoke directly to him:

"Pardner, you look honest to me. Talk a little, will you?"

"Sure will."

The man cleared his throat.

"Mebbe you can explain this here kidnapin' and murder charge. Lonesome Lee's daughter was stolen and old Lonesome was murdered. Anyway, that's how she's been told to me."

"You're —— right!" snapped Blue.

Hashknife looked at Blue, steadily and closely. Blue shifted nervously. He liked to be the center of interest, but not at a time like this.

Hashknife backed against the wall near the door, where he could include Jake Blue in his sweep of the crowd.

"Folks, this is kind of a long tale I'm goin' to tell you, and I ask you to set tight. One crooked move and my pardner, who is just inside the door, will jam down the little handle and we'll migrate together."

"We're listenin'," said one of the men.

"Why listen to him!" exploded Easton angrily. "We didn't come down here to listen to a lot of —— lies, did we?"

"Stuff your fingers in your ears then!" retorted the cowboy who had pulled his horse off the spaded spot. "I sure as —— am willin' to listen. I know dinnymite, y'betcha."

"'Pears to me that the whole thing started over the graveyard," observed Hashknife slowly. "Somebody played a joke on Skelton, and he returned the compliment."

One of the men swore feelingly, and a growl came from several more. They agreed on this point, at least.

"It was a —— of a joke," continued Hashknife, "but was it a joke?"

"Whatcha mean?" snapped Blue.

"Mebbe I'll tell you." Hashknife was quite at his ease. "Old Lonesome Lee owned the Cross-L outfit—and a big thirst—a very big thirst. Bein' drunk most of the time made it plumb easy for another man to hoodle him out of the brand, which was changed to the 88—for a reason."

"That's a —— lie!" snorted Easton. "Everybody knows that I——"

"About that time," interrupted Hashknife, "this old 33 outfit begins to dwindle.

Their cows don't bring in no calves. Everybody hates Skelton, and he knows —— well that nobody is goin' to help him find out where they went to. Somebody tries to buy him out. I reckon there was quite a few tryin' to buy him out. About that time he gets shot at a few times. 'Pears to me that it's a —— bad shot, or shootin' to scare him."

"Now, wait a minute!" interposed Blue. "If Skelton was losin' cows and gettin' shot at, why didn't he come to me about it?"

"You?" Hashknife squinted at Blue and shook his head. "Mebbe you was busy at that time, sheriff."

The inference was plain, and it drew a mild laugh. The crowd was interested in Hashknife's story, and did not relish an interruption.

"Lonesome Lee has a daughter," said Hashknife. "She's a danged nice-lookin' girl, too. Lonesome was too drunk to *sabe* things much, and this girl writes him letters, which somebody else reads—and answers. There was a photygraph, too, I reckon. Pretty girls ain't any too plentiful.

"Then somebody killed Quinin Quinn, and a poor, drunken Swede cook was jailed for it."

"Yes, and if them guns hadn't been stolen—" wailed Blue meaningly.

"Outside of that you feel good, don't-cha?" asked Hashknife seriously. "I dunno who killed Quinn, but I've sure got a hunch. Anyway, this girl was sent for and came to Gunsight, where she kinda dropped out of sight, leavin' a certain party very peevish."

Hashknife glanced at Easton, who was sitting very straight in his saddle.

"Then Lonesome Lee sobered up," Hashknife continued, "and realized what a —— fool he had been. He comes down here to find out a few things, and somebody potshoots him at long range."

"That's your story," interrupted Doc Clevis. "You never let us see the body, so how do we know how he got killed?"

"The man that shot him didn't want him to find out anythin'." Hashknife ignored Doc's peevish statement.

"What'sa idea?" queried one of the cattlemen. "Who didn't want him to?"

"I'm leadin' up to that, pardner. The man who shot him was the man who was interested in this girl. He knew that Lonesome Lee was sober. He was the same man who bought the 88 outfit and changed Lonesome Lee's brand to the 88. Didja ever figure that a 33 is easy to change to an 88 with a runnin' iron?"

"You're a —— liar!" yelped Easton trying to draw his gun. But the man next to him, fearful of the buried dynamite, stopped him.

"Now," Hashknife swayed away from the wall and hooked a thumb over the top of his belt above his holster, "now, I'll tell you where it all started. Hold still, Blue! You're as close to your gun as you'll ever get. Listen, you —— coyotes are to blame for this Lodge-Pole trouble!

"Skelton did not wipe out your graveyard. He had nothin' to do with it. Accusin' him of that was a —— good scheme to git rid of him. It's a wonder that folks didn't lynch him for it. It was a good joke to plant them tombstones in his front-yard. Sure it was. It gave a —— good reason for him to go out and wipe out the graveyard and to stop any more buryin' there."

Hashknife stopped for a moment. Jake Blue had gone gray as ashes, but his eyes flashed wickedly. Doc Clevis hunched in his saddle, his face set in lines of wonderment and fear.

"Skelton told me he didn't do it," continued Hashknife softly, "and I believed him. I knew that somebody wanted to force him away from this country. Them white tombstones"—Hashknife pointed at the yard—"were only an effect.

"The last man to be buried in that graveyard up the road was Faro, a gambler. Jake Blue, Doc Clevis and Spot Easton buried him, 'cause the other folks didn't want him buried there.

"They dug his grave near the little creek. Right after that burial this graveyard joke was pulled off. Do you know why?"

Hashknife leaned closer to the crowd and his eyes flashed wickedly.

"No? You don't? Well, I do! Two feet deep, where that gambler was buried, is the cropping of a ledge of quartz that is so danged rich in gold that it scared me. Jake Blue, Easton and Doc Clevis moved your graveyard for fear they might never own that gold. They killed Quinin Quinn, either because he knew too much, or to try and scare Skelton into sellin' 'em the ranch!"

As Hashknife was finishing Skelton and Sleepy stepped out onto the porch beside him. Behind them came Lonesome Lee.

For a moment there was absolute silence, broken only by the slap of Jake Blue's palm against the butt of his gun.

BUT, swiftly as he drew, Hashknife shaded him by a second and fired from his hip. Blue spun off the porch, splintering one of the porch-posts with his misdirected bullet.

Spot Easton had thrown himself sidewise and fired across his horse's neck, but his horse threw its head wildly, and the bullet buzzed through the doorway—doing no damage. A second later one of the cowboys crashed his horse into Easton's mount, knocking Easton from his saddle.

Doc Clevis, insane from the disclosures, and knowing what it would mean, drew a heavy pistol from under his coat and spurred straight at the porch, only to meet Skelton's riot-gun at close range. He was literally blown out of his saddle.

From the ground, among the milling horses, Spot Easton shot wildly at Sleepy, who was churning up the dirt around Easton's head with bullets. Hagen fired once, and his bullet ripped along Hashknife's forearm just as Hashknife shot. The jar of the bullet threw Hashknife's gun far enough aside to miss Hagen but caught his horse, which whirled wildly, unseating its rider. Hagen's foot hung in the stirrup.

Bucking and kicking, the bronco whirled into the tangle of tombstones where Hagen fell free. Easton's gun was empty and he tried to fight his way out of the milling horses, but Sleepy dove after him and, locked together, they rolled into the open.

Dell Blackwood forced his horse to the porch and held up his hands.

"I'm out of it," he yelled. "I'm admittin' that I stole some 33 calves for Easton, but I never shot nobody."

He tossed his reins to the ground and slid out of his saddle.

Came the rattle of a wagon, and Mrs. Frosty Snow and Jane drove into the yard. Two cowboys helped Sleepy rope Spot Easton, and then all eyes turned to the two women in the wagon.

"Lonesome Lee, here's yore daughter!" called Mrs. Snow.

Lonesome went slowly out to the wagon to meet Jane and held up his arms to her. The crowd watched them silently.

"I been waitin' for you, Jane," said Lonesome slowly as she climbed down over the wheel.

He held her in his arms for a moment and turned to the crowd.

"Hashknife, I want you to meet my daughter; you and Sleepy Stevens."

"Why, I know them!" exclaimed Jane. "They——"

"Know us?" grinned Sleepy. "My ——, I sung all night to her once."

A grizzled cowman leaned over the shoulder of his horse and said to Hashknife—

"You can prove all the things you said?"

"Yeah," nodded Hashknife. "I sure can."

"What about him?"

The man pointed at Blackwood, who stood beside the porch, guarded by another cowboy.

"Him?" Hashknife squinted at Blackwood seriously. "Pardner, I—I dunno. He kept out of this. He admits that he mis-branded calves for Easton, and we could likely send him—" Hashknife shook his head slowly. "Lookin' at it from a cold-blooded angle, suppose we give him his horse and tell him to git to —— out of here."

"But he's a rustler!" exclaimed another cowman.

"That's a fact," nodded Hashknife. "That sure is a fact. He admits it, don't he?"

Hashknife looked around at his listeners.

"How many of us would admit the truth?"

Somewhere in the crowd a man laughed and smiles began to appear. Hashknife had won his point. He turned to Blackwood, who could scarcely believe his ears.

"Blackwood, you're free to drift. I ain't preachin' to you, but kinda remember what might 'a' happened.

"You mean—" Blackwood licked his dry lips. "You mean, I'm free to—go?"

"You've got good ears, old-timer."

Blackwood swung into his saddle, looked at Hashknife for several moments as though wanting to say something, but was unable to begin. Then as he turned slowly and rode out of the yard, unbelieving that any man or men could be so generous.

The cattlemen roped Easton to a horse, picked up Doc Clevis and Jake Blue, and strung out in a long cavalcade toward town.

"What happened here?" asked Jane wonderingly.

"Well, ma'am," said Hashknife slowly, looking back at the tumbled tombstones, "you see, a front-yard ain't no place for a cemetery, so we held a meetin' today to start a new one some'ers else."

"And that ain't such a big lie, at that,"

said Mrs. Frosty Snow slowly. Then to Lonesome and Jane, she said:

"Pile in here and go back to the ranch for supper with me. I hope that danged Swede cook don't take the things to heart that I told him today, 'cause I need him for one more meal. You fellers better come along, too, 'cause I want you to tell me all about it."

"Please do," Jane pleaded. "Perhaps Mr. Stevens will sing for us."

Mrs. Frosty Snow turned the team around and headed for the gate, while Hashknife, Sleepy and Skelton stood together and watched them disappear around the bend. Hashknife went over to the porch and kicked loose the pegs and broken wires.

"Do we go over to Snow's to supper?" asked Sleepy.

"Uh-huh," grunted Hashknife. "I'd like to get used to Jane Lee, 'cause she's sure as —— got a wide streak of humor in her system. You goin', Skelton?"

"After what you've done for me? My ——, I'd even do a little singin' m'self, Hashknife."

"Thassall right," said Hashknife hastily as he wound a handkerchief around his scored forearm, where Hagen's bullet had left its mark.

"Your appreciation is accepted—but don't sing. There's such a thing as carryin' humor to excess, Skelton."

Skelton grinned widely and put his hand on Hashknife's shoulder.

"Cowboy, you shore made history in Lodge-Pole County today, and jist t' show you how much I appreciates it, I'm splittin' the 33 into three parts right now. From this here date, me and you and Sleepy own this place. No arguments a-tall—no sir. She ain't worth a —— of a lot for cows, but if there's a gold mine—anyway, we're pardners; the three of us."

Hashknife looked closely at the old man and at Sleepy, who was busily rolling a cigaret. It was very quiet now. A string of dusty-looking cattle were coming down past the corner of the ranch-house fence, heading for the creek.

A magpie flew past the house, swerved sharply at sight of the three men, and perched on a corner of the corral, scolding earnestly. Fleecy clouds flecked the blue sky beyond the timbered ridges; from the hillside came the whistling bark of a ground-squirrel; down in the willows a cow bawled softly for her calf.

Hashknife turned slowly and took a deep breath, as he said—

"Whatcha say t' havin' a song by the Tombstone trio?"

The WRECK ON TWO-SISTERS

by

Hubert Roussel

IT WAS hot in the commissioner's office but hotter outside. Captain Angus McVittie found the stuffy tin-roofed building preferable to his schooner, even though receiving "the news" as interpreted by the commissioner's assistant was the price of sanctuary.

Captain McVittie was an artist. While he addressed himself to the whisky and soda with a quiet persistency eloquent of the blood that animated his tough old body,

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his aspect of sober interest was without flaw. In reality, more than half an hour had passed since McVittie had consciously listened to anything the commissioner's assistant said.

That calcined and fever-ridden young man, not being cursed with over-observance, rattled contentedly on.

"Let's see now, I believe that's all the news since you were here," he finally admitted, closing the detailed account of a plantation mutiny.

He rose, then from across the room added: "Oh, yes; I forgot. One other thing. Dawson lost the *Sea Witch* on Two-Sisters."

With no outward evidence of struggle, Captain McVittie's preoccupation went down before a sudden real interest. He granted a stay of execution to the drink ready in his hand.

"What was that ye said?" he inquired.

"I say Tom Dawson put the *Sea Witch* on Two-Sisters."

"When?"

"In that big nor'wester, two weeks ago. Complete wreck. Dawson and four of his niggers were all that got clear—mate and all the rest gone. Dawson came in here in the whaleboat. He was going to report to Sydney by the steamer, but it happened his owner, old Carney himself, came out on that same Sydney steamer."

The assistant paused to grin and shake his head.

"Dawson'll never get another Carney craft," he said. "The things the old man told him right here before me would have burnt holes in armor-plate. The loss cut old Carney deep, deep. The *Witch* was his heart, his child, queen of his fleet, winner in races—he designed her himself—you'd have thought she was his wife, the way he went on! Besides, she was inward bound with a full cargo of number one shell from Punga."

"And will there be no salvage?" asked Captain McVittie.

"What, on Two-Sisters! Not a show. I said *total* loss, didn't I? The three of us—old Carney, Dawson and I—went over in our cutter next morning. The *Witch* is gone in ten fathoms—sunk to the mastheads. That shell of hers is scattered over half the ocean by now; and as for the hull— My word, old flinty Carney blubbered like a calf!"

"Have ye helt the auction yet, Mr. Lane?"

The assistant commissioner shook his head.

"Going to hold it five o'clock this afternoon, though, in accordance with Carney's instructions. But it's merely a matter of form; there'll be no bidders, of course. Anyone who'd risk a shilling for that mess is ripe for a shot of quinin."

Captain McVittie's drink met its slightly delayed fate. He leaned back in his chair.

"Ye're somewhat new here, Mr. Lane," he remarked; "yet ye're aware, I suppose, that I have salved more unsalvable wrecks than any man sailin' the Solomons. There's been no weather since, eh?"

"None. Hardly a breeze. It's been one calm, just like today. But you don't mean to say you'd bid?" Lane's face was incredulous. "Why, man, you've never seen the wreck!"

"No particular matter," replied McVittie. "I've not sailed past Two-Sisters these twenty years for naught, have I? If I might talk with Captain Dawson——"

"But you can't. Dawson left for Ysabel in his whaleboat yesterday morning."

"Oh, vairy well then, I'll be seeing what the beach has t' say on it, anyway," declared McVittie, and shortly took his departure.

THE young assistant commissioner was not surprized to find a crowd of three awaiting him on the veranda of the office at five o'clock. The silly auction was a good enough excuse for trading skippers to come ashore for a chat and a drink. But he was surprized and perplexed when he received a genuine bid for the wreck. Captain Angus McVittie, it seemed, was a man without a conscience, to say nothing of a fool. For the late queen of the Carney fleet he offered her owner, through Mr. Lane, the ignominious sum of twenty pounds. This, he blandly assured, was merely by way of opening the bidding; but as there were no other offers, the bidding also closed at that figure, and the *Sea Witch* wreck became McVittie's property simultaneously with three-fingers of the commissioner's best whisky.

Mr. Lane was confounded; but, as had been pointed out by McVittie earlier in the day, he was a bit new on Florida. There were things he knew and other things he didn't know. No one, for instance, had ever told him the situation at Punga Atoll,

whence the *Sea Witch* had lifted her cargo.

It was Captain McVittie who had discovered there was workable shell in Punga lagoon, a year before. He had promptly made request of the proper Government officials for the concession to dive the shell out. But there a hitch occurred. It developed that Punga Atoll, though deserted, was under lease to Mr. Jason P. Carney, along with three neighboring islets where he was raising nuts. The lease, it seemed, carried the priority right to work whatever shell, bêche-de-mer, and so on might be in the lagoons and bights embraced. But the clause was merely a matter of form—Carney had leased the islets solely for agricultural purposes. Everybody had known for a hundred years there wasn't workable shell in Punga lagoon—till the day McVittie blundered into a certain part of it with his water-glass.

When he discovered who held the lease, McVittie had misgivings; he had heard certain things about Mr. Jason P. Carney, not complimentary. Nevertheless, he went all the way to Sydney to see that gentleman in his office. He told what he knew and made a proposition to work the shell on half shares. Jason P. Carney laughed in his face.

"Half shares!" he shouted. "Half shares! What for? Haven't I got schooners enough of my own? If what you say's true I'll work the shell myself, of course! Why in blazes should I pay *you* to do it?"

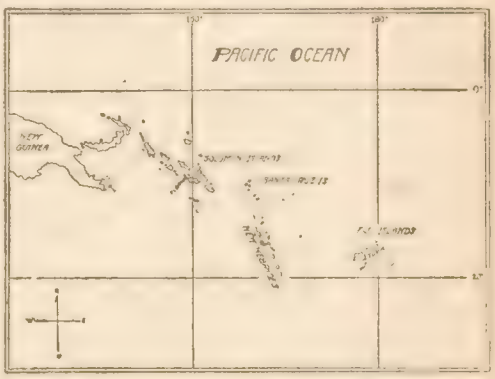
"We-ll, 'tis more a matter of—of honor," had suggested McVittie. "'Twas I who found the shell was there; ye'd never have known otherwise, Mr. Carney. 'Tis like three thousand quid or so picked up for you if——"

"Honor my eye! If that's your game, you've had your trouble for your pains, understand? The idea! Wanting me to pay for something that's already mine! Ha! Look here, Captain McVittie, Punga Atoll belongs to me. In the first place, what were you doing snooping around there, eh? I'll jolly well see that you and your sneaking boat keep out in future, and if there is shell there I'll send my own boats to work it, understand? Honor! You island sharks are great ones to talk of honor! Bah! I'll give you ten pounds for your information. If you don't want that, then good day; I'm busy."

McVittie had sat there stunned and staring for a moment. Then he had muttered: "Ten pounds? *Ten pounds!* Why, ye dirty rat!" and his feelings had overwhelmed him. He had risen from his chair, assisted his host to do likewise, and thereupon done things to J. P. Carney that messed up the room considerably and cost the skipper a sizable fine in police court.

Even then McVittie's hope died hard. In his despair he went to see a lawyer regarding the lease. But the lawyer also laughed at him. "Sorry, you wouldn't have a show in the courts, captain," said he; whereupon McVittie's not overly good opinion of courts and the law in general slumped as low as his opinion of Jason P. Carney, and he was forced finally to take himself dejectedly back to his natural haunts.

Of all this young Mr. Lane knew nothing. So he wagged his head again when at dusk McVittie came round to ascertain the exact location of his bargain. Having got it,



McVittie climbed aboard his own schooner, the *Terrier*, and gave the order to up-anchor. As there was scarcely a breath of air, he sent his mate below to start the auxiliary motor, and to its rattling song the schooner slid out of harbor in the moonlight, and presently lost Florida Island over the horizon.

Among the thousand-and-one coral reefs that make navigation in the Solomons a risk never solicited by the underwriters, Two-Sisters Reef stands out with considerable prominence. Running the entire length of the lesser island of Sugo-Sugo, a mile off its west coast, it thrusts sheer upward ten fathoms, and in calm weather shows its jagged teeth just a few inches above the tide. The gentlest of ground-swells, striking these teeth, is torn and disintegrated and set furiously boiling, so that

a stretch of swirling, troubled, foam-ridden water forever flanks the reef on either side, effectually hiding from the prying eyes of men the secrets of the depths wherein Two-Sisters has its roots.

It is the graveyard of a dozen schooners, cutters and ketches, none of which was ever glimpsed again, much less salved. Moreover, it is considered decidedly bad form for a wrecked and unarmed skipper, washed across the reef, to land on the beach of Sugo-Sugo. Certain bushmen of that island have been known to reward such breaches of taste by possessing themselves of the white man's head.

IN THE grayness of dawn the *Terrier* approached Two-Sisters from the northwest. The schooner was under a full spread of canvas, but all of her sheets drooped damp and lifeless from gaffs and stays. Only once during the night, for a brief two hours, had they helped her on her way; for the rest, the stuffy calm had held and it was still her noisy auxiliary motor that drove the *Terrier* along.

Captain McVittie, as he picked up the bearings given him by the assistant commissioner, took a pair of glasses from the cabin-trunk and intently studied the froth-bordered stretch of reef. Presently he gave a grunt of satisfaction.

"Can ye be makin' 'em out, Larry?" he said, and handed the glasses to his mate, who stood at the wheel.

"Yep," answered that scantily-clad person after a moment. "Both topmasts showin' four foot clear. But she's right ag'in' the reef."

"Then do ye put her over, Larry, an' we'll be going in for a look."

The mate lowered the binoculars, staring his incredulity.

"S'y, look 'ere, Mr. McVittie," he protested, "now I don't just savvy this here game you've made up. I been wonderin'—You ain't figuring to really *save* nothing out o' that *Sea Witch* mess, are you? Because if you are, it can't be done. How could it? An' if you ain't counting on that, then what's the idea? Look 'ere, if you mean to s'y you're going to run the *Terrier* right up there ag'in' Two-Sisters——"

"Tush!" broke in McVittie. "Be about obeying yer orders, man. Here, I'll have that wheel; do you stand by yer engine, an' no talk."

Half an hour later, the sun up and already hot, the *Terrier* at her slowest speed sidled warily toward the place where the two topmasts of a schooner rose several feet out of the water, on the seaward side of the reef. Though there was yet no hint of wind, the *Terrier's* sheets had all been taken in as a precaution against an unexpected puff. The sea was ruffled by only a low ground-swell which broke and hissed softly on the serrated coral.

At McVittie's command, one of the whaleboats had been lowered, and rode alongside. As they drew within sixty yards of the projecting topmasts, he ordered four of his black crew into the boat, instructing them to take a length of cable, make an end fast about one of the masts, and return to the schooner.

Puzzled and muttering, they obeyed. In due course the returning whaleboat overtook the idling *Terrier*, the free cable-end was brought aboard, and the skipper saw it fastened round a bitt. A slack steel rope an inch in diameter now connected floating schooner with submerged mast. Then McVittie deliberately headed the *Terrier* straight out for sea and turned to the mate, whose sweating, anxious face protruded from the after-hatch.

"Full speed ahead," he ordered.

His subordinate's jaw dropped open.

"Wot?"

"Tush, man; can ye not hear? I said, full speed ahead. Lively."

With a baffled, hopeless wag of his head, Larry dropped below and executed the order. As the *Terrier* leaped forward at her best speed, he scrambled hastily on deck. Every one aboard, McVittie excepted, stared fascinated at the rapidly tightening cable, and braced himself for the inevitable jar and crash that would come when it snapped taut.

Suddenly the cable rose whishingly out of the water; it snapped taut—and there was no crash whatever, and only the barest of jars. Instead, the *Terrier's* engine popped merrily on, whereupon the wondering eyes of mate and crew beheld the attached mast bend down to the water till only its truck was visible, and then with all docility begin to follow them out to sea!

"Shut yer engine down," yelled the skipper presently to the dumfounded Larry. "And do ye rig that cable to the capstan, an' get her alongside."

This proved a task of some difficulty, for another surprizing thing now happened. Instead of rising to the surface and floating as any ordinary wooden mast should float, their tow had sunk straight down entirely out of sight in the deeper water; and as they hauled at it laboriously with the capstan, it seemed to weigh tons.

"I swear," gasped Larry, prepared now to believe anything, "she's got t' —— *Sea Witch* on to th' other end o' her, wot?"

But when finally, having fastened a second cable, they lifted their salvage alongside, the inaccuracy of this conjecture was revealed. What they had was simply a schooner-mast, obviously ancient, utterly innocent of any rigging or sail, and with—to hold it upright and in position before the reef—at least a ton of scrap-iron cleverly wired to it by means of many holes bored through its lower end. An inspection of its butt disclosed that it had recently been sawn off flush with the deck of whatever craft it had graced.

"Well, s'y now—wot t' ——! Wot t' ——!" was all Larry could mutter.

Captain McVittie showed no surprize. He looked back toward the remaining mast by the reef.

" 'Twould be needless waste o' good gasoline to go back for the other," he reasoned. "Have the men cast this 'un loose and let 'er sink. An' get the whaleboat aboard."

And when the mate returned, having accomplished these commands, he continued—

"D' ye mind, Larry, when we passed Sugo-Sugo day before yesterday on our way to Florida?"

Larry nodded.

"What time would it be when we went by the north end, an' how far was we offshore?"

The mate thought arduously.

"Seems as it was just about ten minutes afore dusk," he remembered. "I'd s'y we was sompin' like two mile off. What——"

"Merely so's to be sure my imagination ain't trickin' me. Now think close. Do ye mind, Larry, a schooner as was just making out o' that lonely little bight 'way up to the north end—the little bight that's past the end o' the reef, and that you can't see into none whatever on account of the high land surroundin' and the mangroves growing right up to the mouth?"

A sudden gleam shot into the mate's eye. He nodded vigorously.

"Look 'ere, I——"

"If some one was to ask you what boat you thought that was, what'd you say, eh, Larry?"

Larry's teeth were now showing in a broad grin.

"Blimme, skipper! Come t' think, I could 'a swore she was t' *Sea Witch*, on'y for one thing! I know the *Witch's* sails pretty fair—but the *Witch*, she was painted all over dark—black hull, y' know. This here schooner we seen was white."

Captain McVittie passed up the obvious answer.

"Larry," he said, "I wish to have yer advice. You'll remember when I signed ye on down Suva way, you had just concluded a little batch o' work for the Government. Was it copra-stealin' or pearl-poachin' that made yer services in demand by the Crown? But no matter. Here's where I wish yer counsel: Suppose that right here in the Solomons you'd had the rare luck to—to acquire a first-rate schooner with a full cargo of pearl-shell, an' you'd convinced all and sundry the said schooner was sunk proper. Where would ye be sailing yer prize, Larry, to dispose of her and her cargo nice an' quiet, and no particular questions asked?"

The mate's smile grew even broader. He hesitated not an instant.

"Over Borneo way."

"Thanks," nodded McVittie. "I reasoned the same. But I'm always respectful o' your superior experience an' judgment in such matters, Larry. Now since the day before yesterday there's been no wind enough to blow a feather vairy many miles along, eh—and the *Sea Witch* havin' no power— Do ye get your engine to doing her best, Larry, an' let us see what we may see."

SOME thirty hours following this conversation the sun attained its zenith over a certain lonely stretch of the Pacific to the staccato music of many repeating rifles, with a shrill obbligato rendered by their steel-jacketed issue. The sails of the two schooners from behind whose bulwarks the concert was being fought drabbled slack and useless with the sudden waning of a stiff southeast breeze that had held for a dozen hours; but while the leading craft—a yachty schooner of snowy sides and deckhouse—lay motionless and helpless

on the ocean's slow-breathing bosom, her pursuer, whose transom had for five minutes been spouting wisps of bluish smoke and a muffled tom-tom accompaniment to the sharper harmonies, was rapidly eating up the distance between.

As she charged steadily on, her crew of ten, firing through scuppers and over the rail, never let the tempo of battle fall below a thundering crescendo. All along her side she belched incessant flame and destruction. And when at length she drew within a scant hundred yards of her quarry with still no sign of faltering, the weak firing from the white schooner abruptly ceased, and a pale rag on a rifle-barrel was seen to rise above her bulwark.

Thereupon Captain McVittie ordered his own rifles stilled.

"Stand up," he shouted across the water, "an' throw yer guns overboard, Dawson. And make it lively."

When this had been done, the *Terrier* gingerly warped alongside the snowy schooner, whose name was now revealed to be *Jennie II*, and the two boats were lashed together with bow and stern lines. Captain Dawson, sullenly muttering, stood on his quarter-deck, his arms raised before the rifles of McVittie's crew. Beside him stood his mate, one arm upheld, the other being swathed in stained bandages.

"Well, don't grin so," snapped Dawson as McVittie presently approached. "You wouldn't 'a' never got me if you hadn't 'a' winged Heine here by luck. I was afraid to give guns to these —— *abos*"—he nodded toward his own black seamen—"they'd as soon plug me as you."

"Vairy likely," agreed Captain McVittie. "They do show unexpected taste at times."

Dawson stared around blankly, wildly, then flared:

"See here, what I can't savvy is why you're mixing into this, McVittie. What business is it o' yours? By ——, I been thinking all the time you had an agent aboard! I see you ain't. Now tell me, what good's it going to do *you* t' take me back to Florida? If——"

"Tush, man," warned McVittie; "dinna get yerself excited. Ye're in no danger o' being returned to Florida. I've my own ideas regardin' the proper punishment of criminals. 'Tis only reasonable a man canna ruminate best on the heinousness of his crime with a warder forcin' him to do hard manual labor all the while, eh? No, no. What ye need is leisure an' solitude in plenty, so's to mend yer sickly thoughts and seek after true repentance. Do ye reck our position this morning? We're near a hundred mile southwest o' Naobi in the Bismarcks. Now, a little sojourn with that trader on Naobi'll give ye plenty o' time to appreciate the hideousness o' yer offense ag'in' society, Mr. Dawson, an' to work out the salvation of yer warped soul. I understand ye're a vairy smart whaleboat handler, captain."

Within an hour following this, a mild breeze having sprung, the *Jennie H's* whaleboat, containing her late captain, mate and crew, was a dwindling speck on the northern horizon. The two schooners, their sails lowered, still rode rail to rail. Larry climbed out of the *Sea Witch's* fore-hatch and went aft where McVittie was thoughtfully pacing the quarter-deck.

"All tight for'ard, skipper," he reported. "Ain't not a pound o' shell gone out o' her. They didn't get nowheres where they could sell. An' th' prettiest shell!"

His eyes strayed to the shrinking speck to northward and a grin slashed his face.

"But —— blimme, you ain't never told me yet wot's the idea o' *that!*"

"Tush, lad," said McVittie. "Did ye not hear me say 'twas my idea o' proper punishment? Aye, I've no wish to get mixed up a-tall with yer courts an' lawyers such as can twist all things t' their own devious ends. I mistrust 'em. Ye're not forgettin', are ye, the bill o' sale says I bought a wreck? Now, listen close——"

A few minutes afterward, the black crew having been divided, the two schooners cast off. With Larry commanding the *Sea Witch* they made sail, and throughout the afternoon and night laid an east-southeast course. They gave the northernmost Solomons a wider berth than is considered necessary for safety, and when at last they did head west for Sugo-Sugo it was late of the second dimly moonlit night.

Under fores'ls and jibs they ran close together along half the length of Two-Sisters, rounded its north end and doused their canvas. Then, in the calm of half-dawn, they lowered away whaleboats, and by these were carefully towed through the passage into the little bight that was sheltered by high land and mangroves from whatever curious eyes passed that way.

THREE weeks later, at blazing noon, the same two schooners gave Florida Island the thrill of the year by appearing in harbor there.

But the *Sea Witch* no longer looked the same. She came in tow of McVittie's *Terrier*. Her right name now graced bows and transom and her hull was painted the familiar black, but the paint was marked from stem to stern with long, criss-crossing scratches and gouges. Her bowsprit was snapped off near the end. From crosstrees to waterline, and inside the cuddy, she was plastered with dry mud and slime. The glass of skylights and air-ports was largely missing. A topmast was gone, stays had parted, and her rigging hung in ugly snarls, though her mud-stiffened main and foresails could be seen stowed on deck. And right abeam on the port side, just at the waterline, showed a paintless stretch where rough new timbers had been crudely fitted on to form a patch.

Alow and aloft, inside and out, the *Sea Witch* presented every aspect of a craft that has had a bout with reef, tide, and sea-bottom.

Before the anchors were down the whole harbor was in a wild buzz, and by the time Captain McVittie was pulled ashore every skipper in port, the commissioner, his assistant and all the beach riff-raff were waiting. They surrounded him in a gabbling group, while questions flew in showers and salvos. On the commissioner's veranda McVittie calmly helped himself to the conversational lubricant of the tropics, and then gave the same answer to all:

"Tush, tush, gentlemen, dinna get yerselfs excited. I canna explain what I dinna know, now can I? 'Tis a divine miracle an' nawthing less. Only this—it must be there's a great hole somewhere beneath Two-Sisters, a gap, the reef bein' bridge-like, d' ye see? And the *Witch* washed through. For where did I find her? Stickin' up in the shallow water on the inner side o' the reef, almost none the worse but for a little scrapin' an' yonder small breach aport! Aye. 'Twas no more nor child's play to patch an' float 'er and bring her in. As ye know, I've salved many."

And with that they had to be satisfied. He would say no more on the subject.

Somebody laughed.

"Found her? You saw 'er there 'fore you ever bought 'er, I'll wager my socks. Want to sell her?"

Captain McVittie set down his glass and scratched his chin.

"No," he replied deliberately. "No, I'll be keepin' her for myself a while, I think. Ye see, I've took somewhat of a fancy to the craft—and I bought her vairy reasonable."

The miraculous news and McVittie's remarks traveled down to Sydney with almost telegraphic swiftness—as McVittie knew they would. The next steamer out had as a passenger Mr. Jason P. Carney, and the *Terrier* was still in port.

Mr. Carney stood on the broiling beach and halloed out to her again and again, but got no response though he could plainly see McVittie moving about the quarter-deck. He shouted louder and louder till his voice left him and he jerked with rage. And every time he looked out at his beloved, mud-encrusted *Sea Witch*, lying right next to the *Terrier*, he went rigid from head to foot, his face turned an awful purple, and he invited a stroke upon himself. Finally he found a black boatman to row him out. He was boiling as he scrambled over the *Terrier's* rail.

"What's this I hear?" he bellowed hoarsely and wildly at McVittie. "What's this I hear? You've got my *Witch*. ——, it's impossible! I saw her— Down to the trucks! She—I— Why, you—you——"

"Tush now," warned McVittie, looking up and taking notice of him for the first time. "No one asked ye aboard here, Mr. Carney—and now ye've come, ye'll remember I'm not tolerant o' yer fancy names."

"Impossible! Impossible, I say," squawked Carney. "She was down to the mastheads, and—and you raise her! It's devilish! And, by Heaven, I'd sooner see her in the devil's hands! My prize boat! My *Witch!* My— They say you won't sell. You've *got* to sell, d' you hear? I'll not let you have her! Not you! I've come out here to buy, and you'll sell or I'll——"

"There now, there's nawthing ye can do to *make* me sell, remember that—whilst I can an' will throw ye off this boat if ye don't shut up yer racket. Calm yerself. I've said naught about never sellin', have I? Do ye come down into the cuddy and perhaps——"

"Cuddy my eye!" bellowed the frothing Carney. "I see your game, I see it! Waiting for me! But you can do your bleeding right

here and right now. I'd sooner buy her back from the Earl of Hell himself, but go on, go on—name your price!"

Thereupon Captain McVittie smiled sourly.

"We-ll now, seein' it's you, Mr. Carney, the price'll be—twenty pound; and ye'll find the *Witch's* cargo all intact."

"What! Cargo?" Carney's jaw dropped open. "You mean you saved the shell, too? And the price, twenty— Look here, I'll have no joking now, McVittie—I——"

"Oh, 'tis no joke, Mr. Carney, as ye'll see," returned McVittie grimly. "The shell's aboard, and twenty pound is the price, the same as I paid for yer boat at auction. But there's but one condition I'll ever be turning her over to *you* on. Aye. Ye see, ye're to pay me back my twenty pound, Mr. Carney. Then t' show yer deep and proper appreciation o' my unselfish work, ye're to hand over to me your lease an' shell concession on Punga Atoll."

Mr. J. P. Carney's face went suddenly ashen.

"What! You—you pirate!" he blurted in a hoarse scream. "No! Why, there's fifteen thousand in shell left there——"

"I know, I know. Just aboot half o' what was originally there—'tis the same proposition I offered ye in Sydney a year ago, Mr. Carney," interrupted McVittie austerely.

His fists doubled and his eyes grew hard as chips of glass.

"And I'll have nawthing else. D' ye understand? Nawthing else!"

"No, no, no!" Carney was croaking. "It's robbery! Before I do that I'll see you in——"

"Tush now, no profanity out o' ye," snapped McVittie. "Ye'll see me in the commissioner's office in an hour, an' ye'll have the papers ready—or ye'll not be seeing the *Witch* again, understand? You rat, I'd not sell her to ye in a thousand thousand years—I've a perfectly satisfactory offer from a Chinaman over Thursday Island way. Now do ye git—quick!" And McVittie made a movement that caused J. P. Carney sudden painful memories of an affair in his office in Sydney—and sent him scuttling hastily over the rail, into his waiting boat.

"I'll see you in —— first," he finished his threat when sure he was out of ear-shot of the *Terrier*.

BUT as a matter of fact, J. P. Carney held by that vow just thirty minutes. He spent that time sitting under a copra shed on the beach, staring out at his dear, yachty, but forlorn and mud-smeared *Witch*, the pride and the joy of his little heart, while tears of self-pity rolled down his lean cheeks. On three occasions he was heard to gulp:

"A Chinaman! No, no!"

Then he got up and walked to the commissioner's office, and he was waiting there when McVittie came ashore.

The commissioner is authority for the statement that McVittie refused twelve thousand dollars cash for the *Sea Witch*. He was wise, as usual. He took just twice that much in shell out of Punga lagoon.

THE CASE OF ISRAEL IBN IBRAHIM

by George E. Holt

Author of "By Imperial Post," "A Stone in the Pool," etc.

IF, AS we are told, there be many matters in the East which the West can not understand, and, as there are many things in the West—such as a mad haste and a childish desire to speak truth—which are deep puzzles to the East, it is manifest that where East and West meet and mingle, as they do in Morocco, there must be most remarkable occurrences which can be explained by nobody. And this is true. The case of Israel ibn Ibrahim is an example.

First you must know that Morocco is a combination of the Old Testament and the "Thousand and One Nights," overlaid with small patches of English, French, Italian, German, Russian, American, Spanish, Portuguese and a dozen other modern civilizations, and shot through with white Arab, bronze Berber, and black Negro blood, with a trace here and there of the yellow and brown. And as neither creed, superstition nor custom can ever be entirely lost in the transit of ages, some surprizing things now and then bubble up in the pot from the sediment of immediate post-Deluge times.

Moses and Herod are not dead, nor yet Cleopatra. Moses is now a bearded saint, with shells and little coins in his hair, who stamps about the streets of Tangier and calls upon Believers to bless the name of Allah. Herod is a fat, pasty-faced *adool*, who squats cross-legged on a crimson mat in his cubby-hole near the great mosque and gives judgment in the name of the Khalifa to him who can pay most for it. And Cleopatra is, of course, Ayesha, the dancing girl, who lives in the little house behind the mosque, where the stairway echoes to the feet of fat native secretaries and other important officials of sorts.

Wherefore if rods be still changed to serpents, or judgments be given against prophets, or kingdoms be lost for the sake of a smile, is it not all in perfect order, and as it should be? And if spells be worked in darkness, and *jinn* be loosed for evil acts, and men be made utterly mad by forces of which they know not— is that more strange than that the commands of the French Government should fly through the air from Paris and, making little blue flashes when they get entangled in the wire nettings stretched on iron poles in Suani, be captured for the use of the Resident-General? Surely no man, having seen, can say of a thing—

"This can not be."

And so we come in proper order to the story of Israel ibn Ibrahim, which, so far as we are concerned, begins when he was yet a young man—and finishes, too, when he was still young—but old as the tale of the Serpent. That was in the days before the French had seized upon the country and, among many odious things, organized a

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French Bank, which shortly took most of the finances of the land away from the Jews.

IN THOSE days there were many rich Jewish families, and of them all, that of ibn Ibrahim was one of the wealthiest. And of his family—there were seven brothers, and the number was held to be lucky—Israel was the richest.

He had once been a mere money-changer, lugging his basket of coins along the streets of Tangier, or squatting near the Great Mosque. Eventually he procured a little shop scarcely bigger than a packing-case, and across the greasy counter greatly increased his holdings. And finally he reached that state of wealth where he owned his own bank, which had an entire building all to itself, and was reputed to be worth a vast sum. Which he permitted to be thought, because he had English protection and consequently the Sultan and his officials could not take from him that which was his. Although they did try, on occasion.

Now, until this time Israel ibn Ibrahim had been too much occupied with money-making to think of anything else. He loved money—as only a Tangier Jew can love. He knew the voice of each one of the hundreds of sorts which pass current in Tangier. Did a coin fall on the cobblestones of the street a rod away from the doorway of his shop, he could tell instantly whether it was a Spanish peseta, a Moorish peseta, or an English shilling—and there is scarcely a shade of difference between them. But their tinkle was the voice of love speaking to its mate, and ibn Ibrahim knew.

Having reached success at the age of a score and a half of years, ibn Ibrahim would have been content to spend the rest of his allotted time in the gathering of money; in fact, there was nothing else in his mind. But at this point Fate, or Kismet, reached out a hand, seized ibn Ibrahim by the collar, and thrust him into a current that led—But that is the story.

To put it without flourishes, ibn Ibrahim fell in love with Rachael Coriat, a cousin third removed, who reciprocated his affections; and this would have been all well and good if, at the same time, Dolores Santona, a Spanish dancing girl who was about at the end of her rope, had not fallen in love with Israel—and his bank.

Ibn Ibrahim led a quiet, monotonous life, as became a rich banker, and did not frequent the dance-halls where for a handful of years Dolores had been displaying her constantly fading charms to a constantly changing audience. Wherefore he did not know Dolores even by sight—which was the way she knew him. But, as has been said, the inevitable is not always true, so while Israel and Rachael and their large families were planning the wedding feast, Dolores Santona drew her last hundred dollars from Israel's bank and went to see Lalla Marina, who lived in a little room just back of the place where Cleopatra now lives.

Lalla, or "Mother," Marina, was very old, and very wicked, as one could tell by her eyes, and would do anything for a small amount of money—or so it was said. Dolores wished to be very sure, so she had provided herself with much money. Lalla Marina was not only very wicked, but she was also an enchantress, who, the story went, had been tortured to death by Sultan Ismael—though that was a hundred years ago—and had come to life again as a beautiful young girl—and that must have been two hundred years ago.

Dolores had no sooner entered the room where the old woman huddled in her rags, than Lalla Marina called her an unpleasant, but truthful, name, and demanded the hundred dollars which Dolores had carefully hidden in her stocking.

"There is no need for windy mouthings," she growled. "Give me the money you have brought for the purpose, and—it will be as you wish."

Dolores gave her the money. Lalla Marina grinned toothlessly and evilly at it ere she dropped it against her dirty breast. Then she took from a little box painted in many colors, a tiny blue vial, no larger than her little finger, which she shook at Dolores.

"*You* do not know him. You have never drunk wine with him. He would drink with you—when he would drink with *Shaitan*—the Devil. So *I* must do it. But that will be easy. My granddaughter is helper to the cook at his house. She will put it in his wine—tonight." She tucked the vial away, and then snarled at Dolores:

"Why do you stay! Get out! Begone! I care not for the company of——." She used a word which should have made Dolores angry, but did not. "He is yours. You have lost your virtue, which you never had, and your beauty, which you once had—and shortly—there is no charge for

this knowledge!—shortly you will become drunk and fall from a roof, which will make you somewhat repulsive to look at. But you shall have your Jew of a banker; fear not." That was all there was to *that;* the rest runs even more swiftly.

The next day—it was only two before the wedding—Israel ibn Ibrahim, walking down the *Siageen,* or main street, met, almost in front of his bank, a Spanish woman who wore the dress of a dancing girl and had a worn mantilla thrown over her head. He looked into her eyes, and then continued to look—and then he spoke to her.

The next day—and what interest have *I* in telling untruth?—the next day he broke the engagement to his cousin Rachael—and married the Spanish girl before the English Consul. He became the scorn of his family and his friends, and the butt of the street. Because he spoke eternally and interminably of the beauty of Dolores, and the virtue of Dolores, and the wisdom of Dolores—to those who knew her as a wornout woman of the dance-halls. He sold his bank and bought jewels and houses for her—and she repaid him with infidelities about which the whole city buzzed. But his madness grew and grew—even after she fell off the roof.

Yes; that also came to pass as Lalla Marina had said. She grew drunk one day and fell, cutting her face horribly upon an iron lattice. She was hideous thereafter—but Israel gibbered throughout the market-place of her incomparable beauty.

And then?

It lasted for two years, perhaps three. Then he had not a peseta left, so Dolores went to Malaga with a blind musician. Ibn Ibrahim went back to his money-changer's basket—and the street. When you are in Tangier go to the southwest corner of the great mosque, and look into an old packing-case of which the front is hung with gunny-sacking. If ibn Ibrahim is still alive you will find him there.

But—it is improbable?

I agree with you. Most improbable. Which is often the case with a true thing.

BEYOND THE SUNSET

A Three-Part Story Part I

by ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH

Author of "The Doom Trail," "A Son of Strife," etc.

CHAPTER I

I AM SAVED FROM MYSELF

THAT day I touched the uttermost depths of human misery. There was a breath of Spring in the air, and I sensed the feeling of black hopelessness as never during the dreary routine of Winter. Outside in the trees of Pearl Street the bluebirds and robins bickered together, and the people who passed the door were no less irresponsibly gay. In all New York, it seemed, none save I lacked cause for pleasure. John Allen, the young Dorset bondman whose liberty I had purchased when I hired him for clerk,

"Beyond the Sunset," copyright, 1922, by Arthur D. Howden Smith.

whistled between his teeth as he labored his quill across the ledgers—when he was not glancing askance at me. Upstairs I heard the crooning of Scots Elspeth, and the strident plaint of my son objecting to her ministrations.

Why should that baby voice be potent only to evoke for me the bitter memories of my loss? I frowned as I sanded the last sheet of a letter to my London correspondents.

"An early Spring after an easy Winter," remarked Allen tentatively. "That should mean a rare flood of furs from the far savages, Master Ormerod."

I growled an assent. I knew the boy meant well. He was ever trying to draw me out of myself.

Upstairs a door opened, and a yelp of infant glee rang in my ears. I leaped to my feet and ran into the hall.

"Elspeth!" I roared.

Her plump features and decent gray locks appeared at the upper landing.

"Eh, sir!" she answered. "I can hear ye fine."

"And I can hear naught but mouthing of silly rimes and puling babble," I snapped savagely.

"And gey *prrroud* ye micht well be of that same," she retorted. "It's what ma douce lamb that's gone wad be tellin' ye, if——"

'Twas hopeless to argue with her, and cursing, I crossed the lower hall to the room I devoted to my private affairs and slammed the door after me. But even as I sank into the chair beside the cold hearth, I knew that I might not find escape from that sweet ghost that haunted me, so real, so vital—yet so remote. Wherever I went in that house she followed me. It was as if she sat now in the opposite chair, a bit of embroidery in her lap, her brown eyes dwelling fondly on my face. Almost I could see again the swift, birdlike movements as she rose and darted the length of the bearskin rug to drop beside my knees. I gasped with pain as my imagination reproduced the pressure of her arms, the tilt of her upturned chin.

Two years of happiness I had known with Marjory, two years of quiet homeliness and love, after a lifetime of struggle, hardship and misfortune. An outcast and adventurer since boyhood, exiled from my native England for adherence to the Pretender, my estate forfeited, alone and friendless, I had fled to this barren colony on the shores of the New World; and in one short year I had found Marjory and fortune! Then—death! Death, with the inexorable suddenness of a tomahawk in the forest. The birth of our child, joy that was intoxicating in its fervor, new plans for the future, and the strange fever that the Portuguese snow had fetched northwards from the Main to scourge New York. In one short week my joy was turned to ashes. She, who had braved the perils of the wilderness with me, wilted in a day. She was gone. There was only the grassy mound, the red-brown stone in Trinity churchyard—and the baby, heedless of it all, as content with Elspeth or any other woman creature as with her who had borne him.

I had not wept. I could not weep. But my soul turned sour within me. Life had no savor. I toiled through the Winter with leaden feet, praying that time would dull the ache. And now I found that it stabbed worse than ever.

I rose and walked to the window, turning my back upon the picture which persisted in shaping itself upon the hearth-rug. Westward across the house-roofs that stretched to Hudson's River the sun was slowly sinking in one of those magnificent displays of coloring that only the New World can show. It meant nothing to me. I turned impatiently, and retraced my steps.

ABOVE the fireplace hung the musket, shotpouch and powderhorn that I had carried on many a wilderness trail. Mechanically, I unhooked them from the antlers of a deer that Marjory had watched me shoot in the forest above the King's Bridge, and weighed them in my hand. What thought was in my head I can not say; but, still mechanically, I rammed down charge and leaden ball, drew back the hammer and dusted a pinch of powder into the pan. Then I resumed my seat by the hearth, and cradled the gun on my lap, musing over the past. A myriad ghosts swarmed before my eyes, ghosts of London, of Paris, of the wilderness, of many other places, kings, queens, great lords, priests, soldiers, merchants, heroes and cowards, honest men and scoundrels, Indians in warpaint, courtiers in five-pound ruffles—but in front of them all stood the one ghost I could never avoid, lips always parted as if for a kiss, brown eyes glowing with love.

I shuddered.

The door opened behind me.

"Master Ormerod! I knocked, but you——"

'Twas Allen. He shut the door hastily, and sprang across the room to my side. As I looked up, he gently unfastened my fingers from the musket in my lap.

"Sure, sir," he said, white to the lips, "there are no Mohawks or other desperadoes in New York town that you must keep gun in hand in your own house."

He lifted it to the level of his lips, blew the powder out of the pan in a dirty-gray cloud that drifted on the Dutch tiles.

"An unchancey thing to keep loaded and primed within doors," he continued evenly.

"It might go off," I admitted.

He rehung gun, pouch and horn on the antlers before he replied—

"There are gentry to see you, sir."

"I'm in no mood to see people," I answered fiercely, ill-humor returning with realization of the sorry picture I had presented to the clerk.

"But these——"

"Send them away. I'll not be annoyed with them."

The door was thrown open again with a crash.

"How now, Ormerod," bellowed a choleric voice. "Is this the way to treat my dignity, let alone my friendship? Must you keep me cooling my heels on your doorstep the while you consider the order of my admittance? Look to yourself, lad, or I'll have you shackled in the dungeons of Fort George. Aye, and there's another hath reason for distemper with you. Whilst I have walked so far from the Bowling Green, he is new-arrived from the Iroquois country, and mainly that he may deliver you a belt, if what I hear be true."

I jumped to my feet, shocked out of my evil mood, and chagrined by the discourtesy I had put upon the greatest man in our province, aye, the governor himself, Master Burnet, to whom we all owe more than we shall ever be able to repay for the diligent statecraft with which he nursed our community to increased wealth and prosperity. I know there are those who cry out against him, more especially since he was transferred to Massachusetts to wrestle with the dour Puritan folk and fell foul of their sanctimonious ways and contentious habits; but I account such no more than fools. He had a stern eye for the king's prerogatives, I grant you, and a jealous opinion of his own authority. But on questions of policy he was right ten times where his antagonists were right once.

He was a stout personage, ruddy of countenance and with strongly carved features, blunt, dogmatic, yet quaintly logical, a stanch friend and a fearless foe. He stood now in the doorway, feet planted wide, and drove home his words with thuds of his cane.

"Your Excellency!" I gasped. "I was at fault. I pray you——"

"Tush!"

He waved his hand in a gesture of derision, but a kindly gleam showed in his prominent eyes.

"Say no more, lad. I know what is wrong with you. 'Tis that brings me here—and other friends, too."

He stepped aside, and I exclaimed with surprize as my eyes discerned the two figures that slipped noiselessly out of the hall shadows.

"Tawannears! Peter!"

The first was an Indian, whose lithe body was naked above the tanned deerskin thigh-leggins and gaka, or breechcloth. On his chest was painted a wolf's head in yellow, white and black pigments. Tomahawk and knife hung in sheaths against either thigh. A single eagle's-feather was thrust into his scalp-lock. His bronzed face, with its high-arched nose, broad forehead and square jaw, was lighted by a grim smile.

"*Kwa, Otetiani,*"[1] he said, giving me the Indian name that the Keepers of the Faith had bestowed in placing me upon the roll of the Wolf Clan of the Senecas.

And he lifted his right hand arm-high in the splendid Iroquois gesture of salutation. I answered as befitted one who was not only my clan brother and friend, but the war chief of the Great League, and as such, Warden of the Western Door of the Long House.

After him entered a mountain of a man, whose vast bulk was absurdly overemphasized by the loose shirt and trousers of buckskin he wore and the coonskin cap that crowned his lank, yellow locks. Others might be deceived by the rolls of fat, the huge paunch, the stupid simplicity of the broad, flat face, with insignificant features

[1] "Hail, Always-ready."

dabbed here and there, the little, mild blue eyes that blinked behind ramparts of loose flesh, but I knew Peter Corlaer for the strongest, craftiest forest-runner of the frontier. Beneath his layers of blubber were muscles of forged steel and capacities for endurance that had never been plumbed.

"Zounds, man, but I'm glad to see you," I cried, trusting my fingers to his bear's grip.

"*Ja*," he answered vacantly in a tiny squeaky voice that issued incongruously from his immense frame.

I saw Allen staring at him in amazement, and I could not restrain a laugh—I, who had not smiled in six months.

"You are safe to go now, John," I said. "They are old friends I had not expected to see so soon."

The governor clapped his hand on the clerk's shoulder.

"Aye, my lad, y'are safe to leave your master with us," he said in his kindly fashion. "Y'are a good youth. We have room for your like in New York. Here what ye have been matters not. 'Tis what ye are that counts. But leave us now, for we have much to discuss."

I TURNED again to Tawannears, as Allen closed the door behind him.

"What brings you, brother? You are welcome—that I need not say. But you two are the last I should have looked to see walk in here out of Pearl Street. Tell me all! How are my brethren of the Long House? Have any challenged the Warders of the Door? What news from beyond the Lakes? Are the French——?"

"God-a-mercy!" protested Master Burnet. "Accept reason, Ormerod. A question at a time, and in due order, if it please you. And may a guest sit in your house?"

I laughed again—as I doubt not he intended—and waved to all three of them.

"Prithee, content yourselves," I bade. "Y'are not such strangers as to require an invitation."

The governor let himself down into my armchair. Tawannears, his white teeth exposed in a pleasant grin—for, like all Indians, he had a keen sense of humor—sank upon the bearskin rug, and after a moment's hesitation, Corlaer imitated him.

"My brother will not take it amiss if Corlaer and Tawannears slight his chairs?" inquired the Indian in his cadenced, musical English that took on something of the sonorous rhythm of his own tongue. "We forest people are not used to setting our haunches at right angles to our feet. I learned much from the missionaries when I went to school with them as a boy, Gaengwarago,[1] but I never became accustomed to the white man's chairs. Hawenneyu, the Great Spirit, meant the earth to sit on, as well as to walk on. It is the only chair I know."

"But Corlaer, it seems, has been to school to your people to better advantage than you were with us," retorted the governor.

"The white man learns more readily than the Indian," affirmed the Seneca. "That is the reason why he will some day push the Indian from his path."

"From his path?" I repeated, interested as always in the thoughts of this learned savage, who combined in his own mind to an amazing degree the philosophy of the civilized white man and the mental reactions of his untutored people.

"Yes, brother," he answered. "The time will come when the white man will push the Indian out of all this country."

"But where will your people go?" I asked.

"Who knows? Only Hawenneyu can tell. Perhaps he will care for them in some new land, out there, beyond the sunset."

And Tawannears waved his hand toward the kindling glory that overhung the west.

The governor leaned forward in his chair.

"Aye, t'was what I had in mind," he declared. "What lies there beyond the sunset? You know something of it, Tawannears, but you do not know all. 'Tis knowledge of that I crave. In a manner of speaking 'tis that brings us together here."

He was silent for a moment, and we all watched him, resting his chin upon the clasped hands that supported his cane, his eyes glued upon the Western sky.

"Tell your story, Tawannears," he said abruptly. "That is the simplest way to expound an involved situation. And do you heed him, Ormerod. There is more than a whim of mine in this. It may be your own future well-being is at stake."

I fixed my eyes upon the Indian's face.

"Yes, tell your story," I urged.

He bowed his head in assent.

"I will tell, brother. Tawannears speaks also for Corlaer. Is it not so, Peter?"

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[1] "Great Swift Arrow"—Indian name for Governor of New York.

The big Dutchman's mouth opened to emit a shrill "*Ja.*"

"First, my brother, Ormerod, whom we of the Hodenosaunee[1] call Otetiani," the Indian resumed, "I will strive to answer the questions that you asked. I bring you greetings from your foster-father, my uncle, the Royaneh[2] Donehogaweh. He bids me say to you that his heart longs for his white son. He keeps a place always prepared for you in his lodge. He took counsel with me before I left the Long House, and advised me to seek you out. All is well with my people. The Western Door is secure. No enemies have challenged it. But Tawannears has been idle, and so his thoughts have turned to the hunger in his heart, that my brother will remember was there in other days."

He rose to his feet, like all Indian orators, unable to find comfort in delivery whilst seated. Arms folded across his naked chest, his eagle's-feather well-nigh touching the ceiling, he towered above us, an incarnate spirit of the Wilderness.

"My brother has not forgotten that once Tawannears loved a maid of his people, daughter of your foster-father, who was called Gahano, and was stolen from him by a French dog, and who died that Tawannears might live.

"My brother knows that there is an old tale of my people that the Lost Souls of the dead go to the land of the Lost Souls, which is ruled by Ataentsic[3] and her grandson Jouskeha, which is beyond Dayedadogowar, the Great Home Of The Winds, beyond Haniskaonogeh, the Dwelling-Place of the evil-minded, aye, beyond the Setting Sun.

"My brother knows it is said that once a warrior of my people, placing his trust in Hawenneyu and the Honochenokeh,[4] traveled westward after the Setting Sun, and daring all things, came at last to the Land of the Lost Souls, where he found a maiden whom he had loved, dancing with other Lost Souls before Ataentsic. And Jouskeha, taking pity on his love, gave him a hollowed pumpkin, and they placed the Lost Soul of the maiden in the pumpkin, and the warrior carried it back to the Long House, and his people made a feast and they raised up the soul of the maiden from the pumpkin shell.

[1] People of the Long House.
[2] Hereditary chief, erroneously called sachem.
[3] She Whose Body Is Ancient.
[4] Subordinate Good Spirits.

"My brother remembers that two Winters since Tawannears and Corlaer left the Long House to search for the Land of Lost Souls, but there was trouble between the Hodenosaunee and the Shawnee, and whilst Tawannears and Corlaer were in the country of the Dakota, across the great river Mississippi, they were called back by a message from the Hoyarnagowar.[1] Six young warriors of ten lost their lives that the message might be delivered. Tawannears returned. Since then he has discharged the duties of his people. Now he is free again."

He took a step toward me, his face blazing with the keen intelligence that was his outstanding characteristic.

"O my brother, so much I have said of Tawannears. I speak next of you. Word came to Deonundagaa[2] in the first moon of the Winter that the flower that had twined around your heart had withered and died. Oh, my brother, great was our grief; but in grief words are as nothing. I thought. I knew your loss because I, too, had suffered it. I said to myself: 'Otetiani is a man. He can not weep. He has withstood the torture-stake. But he will suffer greatly in his mind—even as I have suffered. What will aid him?'

"And then, O my brother, I saw what should be done. I summoned Corlaer, and I said to him: 'We will go to New York and find our brother Ormerod, and take him with us to hunt again for the land of Lost Souls. A strange trail is best for the man whose mind is burdened with sad thoughts. If we find the Land of Lost Souls, perhaps the souls of the white people will be there, and he may recover her whom he has lost. If we find nothing, still he will have the journey, strange trails, new countries—and the pain in his heart will be dulled.'

"So, my brother, Corlaer and Tawannears came to New York, and lest my thought should be a wrong one—for Tawannears, after all, is an Indian and can not know always what is best for a white man—we went first to Gaengwarago, who is wise in the ways of all people, and spoke with him. And now it is time for him to deliver his judgment.

"*Na-ho.*"[3]

"But, Tawannears," I cried, as he

[1] The Council of the Royanehs, governing body of the Iroquois.
[2] Chief Village of the Senecas and site of the Western Door.
[3] "I have finished."

dropped gracefully to the floor, "you forget that I am a Christian! My religion tells me nothing of a land whence the dead may be recovered. Think, brother, you were schooled in the natural sciences by the missionaries. How can you credit this—this myth? 'Tis true I have heard you tell it before, and I forebore to question because I would not add to your sorrow. But now I may not pass it by in silence. Forgive me, brother, if my words hurt you. I strive to speak with a straight tongue, as brothers should."

He lifted tranquil eyes to mine from his seat on the bearskin.

"My brother does not hurt Tawannears," he said. "A straight tongue can not hurt. Brothers often disagree. It is true that the missionaries taught me as you say. It is true that I have read the Bible. The missionaries are good men. The Bible is a good book. There is wisdom in it. But the men who wrote it did not even know that the Indians existed. They had never heard of this country. How, then, brother, could they know what the Great Spirit devised for the Indian? No, Ormerod, I think that the Great Spirit who made the world, who put the salt water in the ocean, which men use only for travel, and fresh water in the rivers, where men go to drink, may well have created a different afterworld for the Indian than for the white man."

"Nay," I insisted, overwrought by this mingling of superstition and rare friendship coming on the heels of my mental anguish. "The soul that leaves the body is bodyless. It can not be touched or seen. Remember, Tawannears, the Great Spirit sent His Son to dwell awhile with the white men, to give His life for the saving of mankind. Yet He said naught of this belief of yours."

Tawannears smiled scornfully.

"That is why I reject your religion, brother. It can not be complete if it does not include the Indian, for the Indian has a soul as has the white man. But I say again: I promise nothing. I shall seek. Hawenneyu, and Tharon the Sky-holder, will decide if it is best for me to find—as for you, also. Life, brother, is a search. Religion is a struggle. I seek for what I love. I struggle for truth and justice. And I believe that the Great Spirit thinks of the Indian as often as he does of the white man."

MASTER BURNET tapped his cane on the floor.

"You waste time, Ormerod," he said testily. "My father was a bishop, and I have had enough of religion in my life to know that godly debates are endless. Let be, prithee! For myself, I care not whether Tawannears be right or wrong. Yet the longer I live, the less sure I am of what is and is not. This continent is so incredibly gigantic that it may contain wonders our work-a-day minds have never dreamed on. A Land of Lost Souls! Well, why not? There were miracles in Judea. Why not in this wonderland? But hist! Bishop Gilbert, my father, hath just turned in his grave. I will ha' done. I am no casuist or Scots catechist, forever probing the chances of salvation. Nay, nay! I have heard many creeds in my time, but I have yet to hear one that surpasses Tawannears'."

I chuckled, despite myself.

"Already you succumb to the lure you deride," I pointed out.

He grinned back at me.

"True, I give thanks for the warning. Let us forget it."

His manner grew serious.

"For you Ormerod, the consideration is not what Tawannears believes. You know him for a tried friend. That should suffice. His offer to you is designed to lift you from this routine, in which, dear lad—to be brutally explicit for the once—you are unable to subdue the pricking memories of that fair Mistress Marjory whom we all loved. I urge you, scorn it not. I have watched over you of late with misgiving. I heard through the door John Allen's adjuration a few short moments since. Y'are unsound in your mind, lad, and that's the truth on it.

"Do not mistake me. I am no fault-finder. Your life has been a hard one. You have had over-much of trial. Your loss is doubly bitter to you, therefore. But that is the reason why you must drink some sharp purge of experience to cleanse your brain of the canker that gnaws now at your sanity. Tawannears points the way."

I looked at him, bewildered. From him to the Seneca, sitting cross-legged like a brazen statue, only his eyes burning with vivid emotion in his mask of a face. And from Tawannears to Corlaer, no less impassive, his little eyes almost wholly concealed behind their ramparts of flesh.

"But such a journey will require much time!" I protested.

"A year," assented Tawannears. "Perhaps more. Who can say?"

"*Ja*," endorsed Corlaer when I turned to him.

" 'Tis impossible," I said. "There is my business."

A shriek of laughter came from up-stairs. I guessed that Elspeth, knowing I was with guests, had relaxed all repression for the nonce.

"And the child," I added.

"Your reasons are not valid," replied the governor. "For your business, John Allen can well conduct it, and I will give him such supervision as he requires. The child is better in Elspeth's hands than any other's. You will mean nothing to him this next year at least. And Mistress Burnet shall keep an eye upon him."

"But there is great danger upon such a journey," I declared—I, who had hungered for death an hour ago.

"Why, that is so," admitted Master Burnet. "We may not dodge it. But you had better die, Ormerod, than linger on in the moods you have known this six-month past. You have enough fortune for the rearing of your son and his start in life. Write your will and leave his guardianship to me. You may make your mind easy on that score."

"You seem uncommonly anxious for me to go," I observed a trifle disagreeably.

"I am," he answered promptly. "I will go so far as to urge you in my official capacity, lad. I am not satisfied with affairs. We checkmate the French at one point, or in a certain direction, and they start an intrigue elsewhere. 'Tis an adventurous people, with a genius for military endeavor that puts us to shame. And to the southward the Spaniards are rearing a power that can be toppled over only by their own recklessness. We English are hemmed in along the seaboard behind the Allegheny Mountains. We are as cramped as fleas at the end of a dog's tail."

"We have not yet begun to colonize adequately this province alone," I exclaimed.

"True, but we are only the vanguard of the armies of home-makers of the future. Remember that. The time will come when our people will be striving to burst their bounds and move on into the dim recesses of the Wilderness Country. What is that country? What is there beyond it? Beyond the Sunset, as Tawannears said? That is what I need to know, what England must know."

He poked at me with his cane.

"Look you, Ormerod, there are three questions to be answered. First, to what extent are the French established on the Mississippi? I know they have built lately a post they call Vincennes on the River Ouabache,[1] but I have not been able to learn if they have progressed permanently below that.

"Second, how far have the Spaniards extended their influence beyond the Mississippi? Concerning this we know practically nothing.

"Third, what is the power of the far Indian races beyond the Great River, and what is their disposition toward us? Something in answer to this question Tawannears has told me, but I must know more."

"You have taken me by surprize," I temporized, turning in my mind recollections of bygone venturings, the soft clutch of moccasins on the feet, the pervading wood-smell of the forest, the feathered whispering of arrow flights, the thrill of the war-whoop, exultation in a close shot.

Master Burnet pressed his advantage.

"Surely, I have taken you by surprize," he persisted. "But the fact is, dear lad, I have striven all Winter for a diversion to lift you out of yourself and this house which is overfull of memories for your present good. Tawannears fetched me what I was unable to conceive. But I would have you consider that it offers more than an opportunity to escape discomfort and ill-health. No Englishman hath traversed the lands across the Mississippi. French soldiers and Jesuits have seen somewhat of it, but never an Englishman. The man who sees it first, and brings home a true account, will deserve well of his people. He will have rendered a service to generations yet unborn."

I peered for the last time at the armchair that stood empty by the hearth. As always, the slim wraith that sat there raised black-coiffed head in a mute gesture of affection. It seemed to me that she nodded in approval. The brown eyes welled with sudden tears.

"I'll go," I said.

Tawannears regained his feet with the agility of a catamount.

[1] Wabash.

"*Yo-hay!*"[1] he boomed.

"Goodt," pronounced Corlaer solemnly.

"'Tis well," endorsed the governor. "You'll not regret it, Ormerod. There's much to do. Let's to it."

CHAPTER II

THE WILDERNESS TRAIL

THE sun was already well above the horizon, but the light that stole through door and smoke-hole struggled unsuccessfully with the gloom of the Council House. From my seat of honor opposite the doorway I could make out only a few of the silent figures of Royanehs and chieftains sitting in concentric circles around the pit in which burned the tribal Council Fire of the Senecas. But as I watched, the direct rays of the sun crept over the earthen threshold, and Donehogaweh, sitting at my left, extended his sinewy arm and dropped a handful of tobacco leaves upon the smoldering coals in the fire-pit. A single column of smoke, hazily blue, rose straight in the air, and the acrid odor of the tobacco permeated the room.

"O Hawenneyu," intoned the Guardian of the Western Door, "and you, Tharon, the Sky-holder, and Heno, Master of the Thunder, and Gaoh, lord of the winds, you, too, O Three Sisters of the Deohako, Our Supporters, and the Honochenokeh, Aids of the Great Spirit and Ministers of his Mercy, heed our prayer! Open your ears to the words we send you by the smoke which rises from our Council Fire!"

He cast aside his skin robe of ceremony, and stood erect in his place, naked except for breechclout and moccasins, his gaunt body as straight as a youth's, his voice ringing with the virility that defies age. He folded his arms upon his chest. His face was raised to the smoke-hole in the roof.

"We are sending forth upon a journey three of our young men. They have far to go. It may be that they will trespass upon forbidden ground. We beseech that you will deal gently with them. If they may go no farther, turn their steps aside, and lead them elsewhere. They are not foolishly curious. They seek to redress a wrong and to learn what is in store for their people. That is all.

"We show them to you, now, before the people."

He signaled me to rise, and I swung food-bags in place and stood beside him, leaning on my musket.

"This is Otetiani, my white son. He is a brave warrior, O Hawenneyu. His mind is clouded by a great sorrow. Take it from him, and let him return to live out his life in comfort."

Corlaer rose.

"This is Corlaer, my white brother. He is a big man, O Hawenneyu, and he has a big belly. But if his strength is great, he can subdue his hunger. He is a good friend and a terrible enemy."

Tawannears rose.

"This is Tawannears, born of the Clan of the Wolf, Warden of the Door. He is the son of my sister. In him flows all that is left of my blood. He goes to fill an empty place in his heart. If it be wise, O Hawenneyu, grant him what he seeks.

"*Na-ho!*"

And from the circles of indistinct figures came a muttered chorus——

"*Yo-hay!*"

Donehogaweh turned to us as we stood by the fire-pit whence the smoke had ceased to rise.

"You are going upon a long journey," he said gravely. "Perhaps many enemies will assail you. Perhaps you will know great danger. Perhaps you will be faced by death. But I charge you, do not show fear. If you return with the scalps of all who oppose you, we will be proud of you. We will dance for you the Wasaseh, the War Dance. If you do not return at all, we will remember you, and the women shall teach the children to honor your memories. But do not return to us unless you can boast of all that you have done, and be ashamed of nothing.

"*Na-ho!*"

He caught up his skin-robe and draped it around his shoulders as he led us from the Council House, the assemblage of Royanehs and chiefs crowding after us through the narrow door. In the flat, hard-beaten Dancing Place outside, the center of the wide-spreading Seneca village of Deonundagaa, stood hundreds of warriors, women, and leaping, scrambling children. They stretched from the door to the *gaondote*, or war-post, its charred, splintered stump rising in the center of the open space,

[1] "I have heard," *i. e.*, approved.

around which were ranked the *ganasotes*, or Long Houses, in which the people dwelt, and from which they took their name.

MOST of them were only idly curious, friendly but with no personal interest. But many who knew us pressed forward for a last, informal word before we left. Guanaea, wife of Donehogaweh—I dislike the debased word squaw, which is inept for a people like the Iroquois, who rate their women far higher than we do—snatched at my hand, her kindly, capable glance examining my equipment. The deerskin garments I wore had been fashioned by her. She had prepared the provender of jerked meat and mixed charred corn and maple-sugar which filled my food-bags. She had contrived my barken box of coarse salt. And she had done as much for Tawannears and Corlaer, too.

"Good-by, Otetiani, my white son," she said, with tears in her eyes. "May Hawenneyu have you in his keeping! I have no son of my body to tell me brave tales of what he has done, and you know that you are doubly dear to me. You must do as Tawannears and Corlaer when the snow flies and rub yourself with bear's grease. It is good at all times, and you should learn to like it. And do not bathe so often. Hanegoategeh, the Evil Spirit, is always on the watch to send ills to those who rub their skins. But here!"

She took a small pouch of deerskin from her breast and hung it around my neck by a strip of rawhide.

"That will protect you against all evils! Keep it always on you."

"What is it?" I asked, slipping it inside my leather shirt.

"A most powerful Orenda," she whispered mysteriously. "I had it made by Hineogetah, the medicine man. It is proof against spirits and bullets. It will turn a scalping-knife and resist a tomahawk."

"But what is it?" I persisted.

She looked around to make sure that nobody was within hearing distance. Donehogaweh was holding a final discussion with Tawannears, and the interest of the crowd was concentrated upon them.

"The fang of a bull rattlesnake," she said, ticking the items off on her fingers. "That is the spirit to resist evil. The eye-tooth of a wolf that was slain by Sonosowa of the Turtle Clan, for, of course, no Wolf could slay a wolf in act of making his kill. That is the spirit to resist courage. A coal from the Ever-burning Fire at Onondaga. That is the spirit to resist disease. It is the most powerful Orenda that Hineogetah has ever made, and I pray that it will keep you safe, for I think you will need it, Otetiani, a white man venturing into the Land of Lost Souls, where the wrath of Tharon may fall at any moment."

"But what of Corlaer?" I asked, amused as well as touched by this essentially feminine point of view.

"Oh, he is different!" she said.

I would have said more to her, but Tawannears turned from his uncle and slung his furled buckskin shirt across his naked shoulders.

"Come, brother," he called to me. "We must go."

I stooped quickly and kissed Guanaea on her wrinkled cheek. She drew back, startled, and raised her hand to the spot my lips had touched.

"What is that, Otetiani?" she asked, bewildered.

"It is the way a white son salutes his mother," I answered.

"Do it again," she commanded.

I did, to the stern amusement of Donehogaweh and his attendant Royanehs.

"I like it," she said. "It is a good son who gives his mother such pleasure. Surely, Hawenneyu will send you back to me."

"If his Orenda is strong and his valor great, he will return," declared Donehogaweh. "But there has been enough of leave-taking. A warrior's strength should not be sapped by sorrow before he takes the war-trail. Good-by, Otetiani, my son. Good-by, Corlaer, my brother. Good-by, Tawannears, son of my sister. We await your return with honor."

He raised his right arm in the gesture of farewell. A thicket of arms sprang up in the Dancing Place, and we acknowledged the salute in kind. Then, without a word, Tawannears turned his back and walked southward through the village. I walked after him, and Corlaer came behind me. Not a voice was raised to shout after us. Not a call came from the surrounding houses. I looked back once—as no Indian would have done—and saw the assemblage standing immobile, Donehogaweh, with his robe wrapped around him, his eyes fastened upon us, his face emotionless. Even

Guanaea stood now like a statue. Then we came to the forest wall, and Deonundagaa became a thing of rooftops, occasionally glimpsed through the thickening screen of greenery.

THE trail was the usual Indian footway, a stamped-out slot, a groove just wide enough for a man to pass, worn in the floor and hacked through the body of the wilderness. We traversed it in silence, each, I suppose, immersed in his thoughts. For the most part, I fixed my eyes upon the sliding muscles of Tawannears' back, rippling so smoothly under his oiled skin, his effortless stride carrying him ahead at a steady dog-trot. Behind me I could hear the grunting of Corlaer and the crackle of branches his broad shoulders pushed against—and by that I knew that we were in absolutely safe country, for the big Dutchman could be as quiet and as agile with his mountainous bulk as Tawannears, himself.

My thoughts turned to the day, three weeks past, that these two had reentered my life, after years of separation, and lifted me at once by the clean ardor of their personalities out of the miasma of sickening thoughts in which grief had immersed me.

Much had happened since then. Hasty adjustments of my business; last-minute conferences with the governor and several merchants, members of his Council, who had generously volunteered to take over the conduct of my affairs; drilling of John Allen in various niceties of the situation; the voyage up Hudson's River by sloop to Albany, huddled under the protection of Fort Orange below the mouth of the Mohawk, our main outpost on the frontier; a fortnight on the Great Trail of the Long House; flitting meetings with old friends; the aroma of the forest; longer and longer hours of sleep; Deonundagaa and—this.

I tossed back my head and inhaled the scent of the wild grapevine that twisted around a giant oak, and my eyes took joy from the mottling of the sunlight drifting through foliage a hundred feet overhead and the scuttling of a rabbit across the trail. We passed a beaver-pond, and I drew a lesson in steadfast courage from the tireless endurance of these small creatures, forever building, and never dismayed by the most arduous undertaking.

Three weeks! And already I saw myself in prospect a whole man again. I straightened with the thought, and took pride in my instant ability to adjust myself to the Indian's trail pace. Tawannears gave me a quick smile over his shoulder.

"My brother's heart is glad," he said. "I can tell by the lightness of his step."

"Truly, I feel as I had never thought to feel again," I returned. "Who would choose to live in a town if he might roam the forest at will? And the day is passing fair."

"*Oof!*" grunted Corlaer behind me. "It grows hot."

We made thirty miles that day, and camped with some Seneca hunters who shared their fresh venison with us. In the morning we continued on our way, still heading south for the headwaters of the Alleghany River.

"For the route we take," said Tawannears, in discussing the journey, "the word of my brother Otetiani shall be law. He has a mission to perform for Gaengwarago. But if you will listen to me you will strike south to the Alleghany, and follow that into the Ohio, which, in turn, flows into the Great River that my people call the Father of Waters. This way, brother, we shall fetch a wide compass around the French post at Detroit, and come near enough Vincennes for you to look at it if you wish. But it will be better for you if the French do not see you or hear of your mission."

"That is true," I admitted. "But for your plan we must have a canoe."

"I can find one," he answered readily. "I cached it on the Alleghany the last time I returned from an embassy to the Creeks."

We settled our route according to Tawannears' advice. Traveling by water, as he also pointed out, meant on the whole a much better rate of progress than land travel, and likewise made it unecessary for us to traverse so many tribal ranges. Tawannears, as a war chief of the Iroquois, was fairly certain of respectful treatment at the hands of any well-known tribe north of the Ohio and east of the Mississippi. But many of these Indians had fallen under the influence of the French, and it was questionable what attitude they might adopt if they discovered who I was. It was safest for all concerned to pass as swiftly and quietly as possible through the country this side of the Mississippi. We had nothing to gain by lingering, and perhaps everything to lose.

The second day we had no beaten trail to aid us, and a cold rain pelted from the east. The country was seamed with shallow ravines and gullies, and at intervals we came to dense belts of undergrowth, spurred with thorns and bound together by vines and creepers. Sometimes we circled these patches. Sometimes we hacked a path with our war-hatchets. We were exhausted when night fell, and we welcomed the shelter offered us by a party of wandering Mohicans; but in the morning we took up the trail, despite the recurring rain. Slippery rocks and ankle-deep mud delayed us. The coarse grass of the occasional swales was treacherous under foot. But we kept on. And I was amazed to discover that the weather had no effect upon my spirits. I enjoyed the independence of it, the sopping foliage, the persistent drip-drip of the rain, the fatigue that strained every muscle. More than all I enjoyed our third camp beneath a bark lean-to hastily contrived. The roof leaked; our fire lasted barely long enough to cook the wild turkey our Mohican hosts had given us; and I was soaked to the skin. Yet I slept through the night to awaken alert and refreshed in the bright dawning of a new day.

In the forenoon Tawannears made his landfall on a tiny creek that fed the headwaters of the Alleghany. We reached the main stream in mid-afternoon, and with one curt glance around, he walked straight to a grass-covered indentation in the bank.

"Here is the canoe, brothers," he said casually.

"*Nein*," said Corlaer, without moving from where he stood, his little eyes fixed on the hiding-place.

Tawannears drew back from the edge of the inlet, a startled look on his usually expressionless face.

"Here I left it, well-concealed," he insisted.

"Smoke, down-rifer," remarked the Dutchman.

Tawannears and I shifted our gazes. The Seneca's eyes reflected a momentary expression of chagrin that he should not have been the first to mark this sign.

"We will go to it," he announced briefly. "This land is tributary to the Long House. We shall see who is bold enough to take the canoe of a chief of the Long House from the threshold of the Western Door."

Of course, he was speaking figuratively, for we were a long three days' tramping from Deonundagaa; but it was a striking manifestation of the proud arrogance of the Iroquois that Tawannears, an Indian to his backbone, insisted upon walking directly into that encampment, without going to the preliminaries of scouting the strange community.

A HALF-GROWN boy sighted us through the trees while we were still some distance away, and his shrill cries gave the alarm. As we stepped from the edge of the forest, a dozen men were grouped in front of the four bark shelters that stood just back from the bank. In the offing I perceived half as many women and some children. They were a dark stumpy people, with low-browed, brutish faces.

Tawannears frowned and pointed to a canoe drawn up on the bank.

"Andastes," he spat contemptuously. "They are dogs and thieves who have no right here. The Hoyarnagowar has bidden them range in the Susquehanna Valley."

Musket in the hollow of his arm, he marched into the center of the dour group, every member of which clutched a fusil, trade musket or strung bow.

"Andastes," he said, "you have taken my canoe."

"We have only our own canoe," answered a thick-limbed warrior, who was out-thrust from the dingy throng.

"I say it is mine," returned Tawannears with haughty emphasis.

"You are welcome to camp here if you wish, we will give you food," said the Andaste evasively.

Tawannears' eyes sparked fire.

"Dog of an Andaste!" he barked. "Who are you to speak as a master to the Hodenosaunee? You crawl when the word comes to you from Onondaga! You eat dirt if a warrior of the Long House commands it! You are the father of all lice!"

The Andastes scowled and bunched closer together, with a tentative poising of weapons. Tawannears drew his tomahawk and held it aloft.

"I am Tawannears, Warden of the Western Door," he said slowly. "I am fresh come from Deonundagaa. Say which it is to be, Andastes, peace or war?"

They shrank away from him. All save two or three disappeared into the lodges

or the forest. But they had no thought of violence. The heart was taken out of them. Tawannears was more than Tawannears. He was the embodiment of that dread power, which these inferior savages knew could carry annihilation in any direction and almost to any distance north, south and west. He stood there, ax upraised, the spirit of the Long House, which even the white men feared.

The Andaste chief lowered his eyes.

"We do not want war," he answered. "Take the canoe. We found it. We did not know——"

"You know that you have no rights here," Tawannears cut him off. "This is the hunting ground of the Long House. Here, too, may come Mohicans, Eries and the People of the Cat.[1] But Andastes belong in the Susquehanna valley. Get back there. If I find you here when I pass this way again, I will carry fire and tomahawk against you and all your people."

He turned on his heel, and with a gesture to us, stalked down to the shore and pushed the canoe into the water.

"Let us go on, brothers," he urged. "Here the air is unclean."

He took the bow paddle, and I crouched amidships. Corlaer, gentle as a girl for all his bulk, slipped gingerly into the stern. Their blades bit into the shallow water, and under the impulse of those slow, easy strokes, the light craft fairly danced downstream, gaining speed as it caught the drift of the current. We rounded a curve, and the Andaste encampment disappeared from view.

"Will they obey you?" I asked Tawannears.

He laughed shortly.

"They will be gone before the sun rises again, brother Otetiani. They know well that they have no right there, but the place is out of the way and far from the Door, and they thought they would be safe. They are a nation of women. We do not even let them fight for us."

PADDLING was very different work from wood-ranging, and we made ten miles before darkness compelled us to land on a miniature island and pitch camp in the lee of a big rock. We had a small fire so arranged that its glow could not be seen from either shore, and beside it we slept under the stars. With the dawn we were up and afloat once more, munching the burnt corn and maple-sugar from our food-sacks.

This day I observed that Tawannears seemed to redouble his vigilance. From his position in the bow he studied the shoreline constantly, and in the afternoon he halted an hour before daylight failed, to take advantage of an opportunity to camp upon another island.

"Why so careful?" I grumbled. "Do you think these Andastes may be tracking us, after all?"

He shook his head, smiling.

"No, brother, but we are entering a country where the Long House is feared, but where its word is no longer law. Anywhere here we may meet bands of young warriors of a score of tribes who have taken advantage of the Spring hunting to look for their first scalps. They would see in us only three victims for killing."

But despite—or it maybe because of—our vigilance, we saw no trace of other men, save once when making a portage around some rapids. As we were in the act of relaunching our canoe three other craft, each containing three red warriors, rounded the next bend down-stream. We waited for them, arms ready. But they made the sign of peaceful intent as they approached, and we held our fire. They were Cherokees, fine, tall men, very much like the Iroquois, and they told us frankly that they were an embassy carrying belts to Detroit. They said their people were having trouble with the colonists in the Carolinas, and they desired to take steps to establish an alliance with the French.

"The French are no different from the English, brothers," replied Tawannears. "They are both Asseroni.[1] They are both white. We are red. There are white men who understand the Indian. Two are my brothers here. But they have few among their race who agree with them. You go upon a hopeless errand. The French will make you promises. They will give you arms, and use you when it suits their ends, and when they have no use for you they will let you go to the stake."

The Cherokees, squatting in a half-circle on the shore facing us and the beached canoes, exchanged uneasy glances.

"Then what does our brother of the

[1] Jegosasa, sometimes called Neuter Nation.

[1] Ax-makers.

Hodenosaunee advise?" asked the oldest chief. "What policy do his people pursue to uphold themselves? They are directly between French and English. If there is no help from one or the other, what is the Indian to do?"

"The Hodenosaunee maintain their place by strength," replied Tawannears. "They have made their help worthwhile to the English. But the time will come, brothers, when the English will no longer need us, when the white man's firewater has debauched our young men, when so many white men have come over the Great Water that they will outnumber the Indian. Then the Indian must go."

"Where?" demanded the Cherokee.

Tawannears waved his arm down-stream.

"Brothers," he said, "I journey to find what lies betwixt this and the sunset—and beyond. It may be that Hawenneyu has set aside a country for the red man that the white man can not take."

"If the red man gives ground forever, then surely the white man will drive him out," declared the Cherokee.

"True," agreed Tawannears. "And if the red men united together, the white man could never drive them out. Your brothers, the Tuscaroras, came north in my father's time, driven from their homes by the same white men who now harass you. We of the Hodenosaunee took them into our League, and now they are safe. The walls of the Long House protect them. Perhaps the Hoyarnagowar would decree a lengthening of the walls if the Cherokees desired to enter the League."

"Yes as younger brothers to sit outside the Fire Circle, without casting votes in the Council of Royanehs," returned the Cherokee with passionate emphasis. "That is what happened to the Tuscaroras. They are dependents of the Hodenosaunee. We Cherokees are a great people. Shall we lose ourselves in the fabric of the Long House?"

Tawannears emptied the ashes from his pip and rose.

"My brother has pointed the reason why the red man can not stand against the white man," he said quietly. "Outside of the Long House the powerful tribes will not hold together. The Hodenosaunee can conquer people like the Eries or the Mohicans, but we see no interest in conquering the Cherokees—and if we did not conquer you, you would not join with us."

"Because we might not join you as equals!" the Cherokee retorted hotly.

"There is no question of equality or inequality," asserted Tawannears. "But the Founders of the Great League created only so many Royanehs, and we who follow in their footsteps may not correct their work. Go to Onondaga with your belts, and Tododaho, the greatest of our Royanehs who warms his mind by the Everlasting Fire, will make your hearts warm with wise talk. Let him tell you, better than I can, how to unite for strength."

The Cherokee rose with a stern light of resentment in his face.

"We go to Detroit," he said. "Better be allies of the Frenchman, and play one race of white men against the other, than be slaves of the Hodenosaunee."

Tawannears did not answer him and was silent until we had paddled an hour or more.

"What did you think of our talk, brother Otetiani?" he asked suddenly, peering over his shoulder at me.

"I thought that you were right," I answered.

"I am so sure I am right that I can see the whole future of the red man," he cried. "He will perish because he can not break down his tribal barriers."

"Der Frenchman, too," spoke up Corlaer behind me.

I turned in mingled amusement and surprize. It was seldom he used more than monosyllables.

"*Ja*," he continued, "der Englishman, he takes in all, Dutch, Swede, Cherman, Frenchman. But der Frenchman, he is der Frenchman. Der Englishman he comes on top. He mixes. *Ja*."

CHAPTER III

THE SHAWNEE SCALP-HUNTERS

DAY after day we descended the broadening river. Once a floating snag ripped our bottom out, and we swam to shore, pushing the sodden craft ahead of us. Tawannears cut bark strips, melted pitch I collected from the pine trees, and salvaged the sinews of a deer he shot with the bow and arrow he carried for hunting game. With these he mended the hole and made it water-tight, and after two days' delay we continued our journey, thankful to have escaped attack whilst we tarried in this

situation, for our spare powder had been wetted.

Treacherous channels and difficult portages hindered us further, but each day saw some advance to our credit, and at last we came to the place which Tawannears called the Meeting of the Waters. We were swept by a rapid current around the shoulder of a point just before sunset, and there opened before us two other watery prospects. At our left another stream, the Monongahela, poured in from the south to join its flow with the Alleghany, and the two united to form the great Ohio.

'Twas a matchless situation. North, south and west ran the three rivers, roads already laid to tap the resources of the wilderness. At their confluence was the ideal site for the erection of a fortress to command their courses and dominate the wilderness for miles around. Indeed, I remember long years afterward—I think it was in the year '60—young Colonel Washington of Virginia, when he was in New York in attendance on General Amherst, told me 'twas here the great French General Montcalm settled to build Fort Duquesne, which was one of the causes of the last struggle for the wilderness land. I remember, too, he said in his grave, simple way, that it should yet be the site of a prosperous town.

We camped that night on the point, the murmur of the waters in Spring freshet loud in our ears, and in the morning we allowed our canoe to be carried into the brawling current of the Ohio. So swift flowed this mighty stream that we had no necessity to use our paddles, save to guide the canoe from rocks and maintain it in the safest channel. We traveled as far that day as we often had in two days on the Alleghany's more tortuous reaches. But there came days when we must be at pains to avoid hidden dangers; when the waters foamed with rocks and submerged bars, and immense trees were hurled along like battering-rams to sink the over-confident. Sometimes we were fain to avoid over-dangerous bits, and stumbled along the shore-line in shallow water, the canoe on our shoulders.

I marveled that we saw so little human life. Occasionally a canoe would dart into the bank at sight of our approach, its occupant seeking shelter in the undergrowth. Twice an attempt was made by other canoes to overhaul us, but I was able now to lend my arms to assist Tawannears and Peter, and we left the pursuers far behind. Again, where the Scioto falls into the Ohio from the north, we encountered a party of Miamis bound south on an impartial hunt for scalps and buffalo robes. They knew Tawannears, and treated us with all respect. But for the most part the river flowed undisturbed on its majestic way to mingle with the Father of Waters.

For days and days we saw no other men. Not even a spiral of smoke rose from the dark forests that marched unbroken down to the shelving banks or the bluffs and hills that elsewhere rimmed the channel.

Then, without warning, came the attack.

The stream had narrowed between low banks, and a riffle of rocks on the north side compelled us to follow the southern margin.

A shot boomed from the southern bank, and I heard it whistle by my head. Other shots echoed it. We all looked around. Puffs of smoke were blowing from the underbrush. The shrill howl of the war-whoop soared in quavering accents above the babble of the river. Painted men, feathers raking from their half-shaven heads, broke cover and ran along after us, firing and yelling. Two long canoes shoved off from the southern bank, and churned the water with four paddles apiece. In the bow of each knelt a savage whose one object was to shoot us down. Bullets *phutted* through the frail bark sides of the canoe and splashed the water all around us.

"Shawnees!" exclaimed Tawannears. "For your lives, brothers!"

We drove our paddles into the water, but our handicap was that we could not veer more than just so far toward the northern bank until we had passed the string of rocks that barred it. We were still some distance above the termination of the obstruction when a jagged slug of lead tore into the canoe between Tawannears and me, glanced from a hickory thwart, and sliced a long, curving slit in the side below the water-line, I dropped my paddle, and clutched the lips of the cut with both hands, one outside and one inside the canoe, striving to hold them together as best I could. The water trickled in, of course, and as the canoe sank under its growing weight it became increasingly difficult to control the leak; but at least we were able to make some progress.

"Good, brother!" panted Tawannears, seeing what I was doing. "A few feet more!"

The Shawnees howled with satisfaction as they perceived our plight. Their canoes shot after us at twice our speed, and some of the warriors on the southern bank plunged into the river where it was narrowest, and swam for the rock-ledge, whence they could wade to the northern bank. But Tawannears and Corlaer kept us afloat until we were almost past the rock-ledge. 'Twas I saw the wavelet that would swamp us, and I shouted a warning to the others. We held powder-horns and rifles aloft and sprang for the nearest rocks.

I went head under and barely saved my powder from a wetting. Tawannears and Peter found footing at once, and the huge Dutchman helped me up beside them. Then we stumbled through the water as fast as the hazardous rocks permitted, zigzagging and stooping low to disconcert the enemies who fired on us from the opposite bank and the two canoes, which drove on downstream to seek a favorable landing-place. The Shawnees who had undertaken to swim the river were already ashore several hundred yards up-stream and running towards us along the bank, and it was at them that Tawannears fired as soon as we had gained the first trees of the forest.

WE WERE panting from our efforts, but Tawannears hit a man in the leg. Corlaer drilled his target through the chest. I missed. But our firing had the effect of confusing the pursuit. Instead of charging in the open, they dived into the forest in an attempt to work down on us from behind. But we sensed their purpose, and tarried only long enough to reload. With Tawannears in the lead, we set off northward, making no attempt to conceal our trail, for we had no time for niceties. The whoops of the swimmers could be heard on our right rear, and answering calls came from the warriors who had debarked from the canoes on our left. Through the tree-trunks we could see some ten or a dozen more taking to the water from the south bank.

Fortunately, the forest hereabouts was a wondrous primeval growth of tall-stemmed, widely-spaced trunks. There was little underbrush, and the ground was carpeted with a deep, springy layer of vegetable mould, the easiest footing for a runner. The light was sifted high overhead by the interlacing boughs, and it was impossible to see distinctly at any distance. The odds seemed reasonably in our favor, despite the continuous whooping at our heels, and I was amazed when Tawannears came to an abrupt halt after we had run a scant half-hour.

"They will be scattered," he said in explanation to my look of inquiry. "We will teach them that they are not dealing with young deer-hunters like themselves. Do you run on a score of strides, Otetiani, and Corlaer as many more. I will fire when I see a target, and flee. Then you will each fire in turn, and run. That way the two in the rear will have had time to reload. Come, brothers, we will scotch these young men who think our scalps as easy to take as a deer's antlers."

Corlaer grunted approval, and we two held to our course. I halted behind a great oak from which I could barely discern the figure of Tawannears lurking behind an uprooted elm. Five minutes passed. The yelping of our enemies had died away. Young hounds they might be, but it was in their blood to save breath once they had their noses on a green trail. Suddenly, I saw a stab of flame in the gloom, and Tawannears darted toward me, musket in hand. The crash of his shot was followed by a yelp of agony, and once more the silence of the forest reechoed the eery war-whoop.

"Watch carefully, brother," the Seneca muttered as he loped past.

I lifted my musket and waited, eyes darting right and left, striving to pierce the depths of the shadow-world that was unflecked by a single ray of sunlight. I stared so long that my eye-muscles wearied, and the lids blinked. I closed them for a moment's rest, and when I reopened them the first thing I was conscious of seeing was a shadow darker than the shadows, that flitted between two tree-trunks on my left. He was so close that I thought I must have been deceived, but whilst I watched he showed again, and I made out the slanting feather above his crouching form. I aimed a good foot below the feather, and pulled trigger. The Shawnee leaped high in air, with a throttled cry, and pitched forward on his face. I ran.

"Goodt," murmured Corlaer, huddled behind a boulder that showed moss-covered amongst the timber.

I sped on, and halted only when Tawannears' low voice reached my ears.

"Reload," he said briefly. "We must run again when Corlaer comes. The dogs are swifter than I thought. Hear them!"

He inclined his ear to the left rear, and I heard distinctly the interchange of signal-yells, once even a distant crashing of branches. The Shawnees were working around in an attempt to head us off. I was relieved when Corlaer's musket boomed, and the Dutchman's huge body bounded into view. He ran as lightly as he did everything else. The man was a swift runner who could keep up with him.

"Now, speed, brothers," said Tawannears. "The next effort tells."

We ran as I had seldom run before, not fast and slow, but faster and ever faster, with every ounce of strength and wind. The yelps of the Shawnees died away behind us again, and I think we had distanced them when we emerged from the forest gloom into a belt of sunshine several miles wide. One of those awful wind-storms to which the New World is exposed had come this way, and wrecked its curious spite by striking down everything in its immediate front. As clean as a knife-blade it had hewed its way, leaving miles of prostrate timber where formerly had been a lordly forest. And across this natural abattis we must make our way in the open!

There was nothing else for it, and we plunged in, climbing in and out of the wreckage, seldom able to go faster than a walk. We were a scant musket-shot from the forest edge when the Shawnees appeared and howled their glee. They could not gain on us, but they were uncomfortably close as we entered the standing timber on the far side of the dead-fall; and we knew that we could not run much farther. My eyes were starting from my head as we dipped into a shallow glade that was threaded by a deep and narrow stream. Boulders dotted its course. Ten yards away an immense tulip-tree overhung it.

I flung myself down for a quick drink, thinking to hurry on. But on regaining my feet I saw Tawannears in close debate with Corlaer. The Dutchman nodded his head, and dropped into the water, which was up to his middle. I made to follow him, but Tawannears motioned me to hold my position, peering the while at our back-trail, alert for a sign of our enemies. I stared from him to Corlaer in growing amazement. The Dutchman clambered up the opposite bank and tramped heavily to a series of stones and small boulders. He planted his wet, muddy moccasins on the first stones, then carefully walked backward in his own footsteps into the river and recrossed to our side.

"Come," said Tawannears, and he dropped into the river-bed beside Corlaer.

Perforce, I followed suit, wondering what mad scheme they were up to.

The Seneca led us down-stream into the shadow of the tulip-tree. Here the creek over ran a flat stone, which came just to water-level. Tawannears stepped on to it, handed his musket to me, caught hold of a low tree-branch and in a trice had swung himself on to the limb. I reached him our three guns, and whilst he worked back toward the trunk, holding them under one arm, I scaled the limb. Corlaer came after me, his weight bearing the limb down almost to the water's surface, so that for an instant I thought it must break. But the resilient wood upheld him, and we all three gained the crotch of the fifteen-foot bole. There was ample room, and the thick leafage gave us cover as we settled ourselves to see what the Shawnees would make of the lure we had set for them.

Nothing happened for so long that I wondered whether they had seen through the ruse, and were plotting to catch us in our lair. But presently a figure glided behind an adjacent tree-trunk, so close that I dared not breathe. Up-stream a feathered head was advanced from the low-growing foliage of the bank and studied the foot-prints Corlaer had trampled on the farther bank. A fierce, painted face was turned toward us momentarily. Then the lean body, clad only in breechclout and moccasins, slipped into the water without a ripple and waded across. The Shawnee crept up the bank until he came to the prints of the Dutchman's wet feet on the stones. At that he turned, with a quick gesture of command, and a string of savage figures dodged after him. We counted thirty-one, most of them armed with muskets. They disappeared into the woods on the opposite bank at a fast dog-trot.

Tawannears dropped from the tulip-tree without a word.

"Where now?" I asked.

He smiled. Never let any one tell you the Indian has no sense of humor.

"Why, we need a new canoe, brother;

and the Shawnees have left two waiting for us on the river-shore."

Behind us Corlaer gave vent to a squeak of laughter.

"*Ja*, we put der choke on dem deer-hunters! Haw!"

We retraced our steps as rapidly as we had come, and because we now knew the way, we were able to cross the area of fallen timber in half the time we had taken formerly. But we were still within musket-shot of the forest-edge when the war-whoop resounded behind us, and a dozen Shawnees broke from cover.

"They are good warriors," approved Tawannears. "When they failed to pick up our trail again beyond the boulders they turned back."

"Shall we wait to welcome them?" I suggested.

"No, brother. We have nothing to gain by killing them. We need a canoe, not scalps."

So we ran on toward the river, although how Tawannears so unerringly picked his way I can not say. 'Twas not so much that he knew the direction of the river. I could have done as much. But rather that he knew by instinct the shortest, most direct route to follow. We burst from the forest's edge a half-musket shot from where the canoes of the Shawnees were beached. Two men who had been left on guard over them, one the warrior Tawannears had shot in the leg in our first brush, rose to welcome us, at first, no doubt, thinking us to be their friends. But when they saw who we were they raised their bows and loosed a brace of arrows at us. Corlaer shot the wounded man off-hand, and Tawannears bounded in to close quarters and brained the other with his tomahawk.

"*Ha-yah-yah-eeeee-eeee-eee-ee-e!*"

The scalp-yell of the Iroquois rolled from shore to shore with the dreadful, shrill vehemence of the catamount's bawl. A defiant answer came from our Shawnee pursuers not so far behind us. Tawannears stuffed his victim's scalp into his waist-belt, and flailed the bottom out of one of the canoes with his bloody tomahawk, then shoved the ruined craft out into the stream to sink.

"Ready, brothers," he called, pushing the undamaged canoe afloat. "We must be beyond musket-shot when the Shawnees reach here. Ha, their hearts will be very sad. There will be sorrow in their lodges. But they have learned that a band of deer-hunters can not overcome three warriors who are wily in the chase."

We bent to the paddles, and drove the clumsy craft—'twas much heavier than the one we had lost—out into the current, where we might have the benefit of the river's drift. And, fortunately, we were a long shot distant when the first Shawnees reached the bank. Several of their bullets splashed close to us, but they soon abandoned the waste of powder, and we could hear the ululating howls by which they sought to recall their absent warriors and announce our escape.

Nightfall found us many miles downstream, but Tawannears would not suffer us to halt. Wet to the bone with sweat and river-water, we paddled on with weary arms that ached, eyes straining into the darkness to ward against rock or floating tree-branch. Near midnight the moon rose, and we could see the channel distinctly; but this was another reason for haste, and we did not rest until the gray dawn light revealed a sandy, brush-covered islet in mid-stream. Here we beached the canoe, hauled it out of sight and lay down beside it to sleep like dead men under the warmth of the sun.

CHAPTER IV

A MEETING IN THE WILDERNESS

SUMMER blew up from the South and wrapped the Wilderness Country in a misty languor. Our arms lagged at the paddling. We were prone to idling back against the thwarts and watching the vast flocks of birds that flew northward, and especially the incalculable myriads of the pigeons, flights of such monstrous proportions that they darkened the sky. Aye, they shut out the light of the sun, for an hour at a time, the whirring of their wings and their sharp cries like the faint echoes of fairy drums and fifes.

The forest trees hung heavy with foliage, vividly green, and the occasional meadows and savannahs were gemmed with wild-flowers, white and red and yellow and blue and pink and purple. The scent of the growing things was borne to us by the gusty breeze that puffed and died and puffed again, heavy as the humid air, uncertain, indeterminate. At intervals storm-clouds tore down upon us, black, towering galleons

of wrath; there would be thunder in the heavens; lightning-bolts streaked earthward to devastate the forest monarchs; and the rain would spill upon us like the torrents of the Thunder Waters at Jagara*.

For two weeks we traversed this paradise without evidence of other men. Alone we surveyed the area of a kingdom. All France, I say, might have been rooted up and transplanted to this neglected wonderland to which her king laid inconsequential claim. Here were timber, ready for the ax; splendid grazing-grounds where only the deer wandered; endless fields of rich black loam, awaiting the husbandman. And the very savages seemed to have abandoned it. If any watched us pass, they contrived to remain unseen. From horizon to horizon there was not a curl of smoke to show a human habitation.

But there were others besides ourselves on the bosom of the Ohio, as we soon discovered. We had slipped by the mouth of the Ouabache in the night, thinking thus to elude the observation of a possible picket thrown out from the French post of Vincennes, although, to say truth, we saw no trace of such an outpost. After a few hours' sleep we were paddling on, encouraged by Tawannears' assertion that two or three days more should bring us to the Mississippi, which we regarded as the barrier of that ulterior Wilderness where our real search began, when we rounded one of the river's frequent bends to face at short range a fleet of canoes that thronged the stream from shore to shore.

Hard luck could not have dealt us a shrewder stroke. In my first glance I spied the trappings of the French Marine Infantry, the regular troops of the Canadian garrisons, the glitter of an officer's gorget, and worst of all, the flutter of the black robe of a priest. Interspersed with these were *habitants* in buckskin, and painted Ouabaches, Miamis and Potawatomis to man the paddles. There were fifteen or twenty canoes, varying from slender craft smaller than ours to larger ones that accommodated six or eight men.

We all three backed water instinctively as we appreciated the situation, but Tawannears redipped his paddle and drove forward again almost without a check.

"It is useless to flee, brothers," he murmured. "We must stand firm."

* Niagara.

There were several shouts from the fleet ahead, and two of the smaller craft sped out from their irregular formation. Tawannears ceased paddling for an instant and raised his right arm, palm out, in the signal for peace. A French officer in a laced coat and cocked hat in one of the large canoes answered him in kind, and the Indians who occupied the two small canoes sheered off as soon as they descried the wolf's head on his chest. No ordinary wood-ranging savages cared to encounter a chief of the Long House in peace time, even with the backing of French troops. They knew their betters; had learned to know them through many a bloody foray.

The French flotilla drifted idly, awaiting us as we paddled slowly between the leading canoes toward the one in which was seated the officer who had acknowledged Tawannears' greeting.

"Who is he?" I asked, when we came close enough to identify his corpulent form and massive face.

"Charles Le Moyne."

"The Chevalier de Longueuil?" I exclaimed.

"Yes, brother."

I stared at the man with increased interest. He was one of the four greatest men in Canada, the eldest son and heir of that Baron de Longueuil who was Lieutenant-Governor. He ranked next after the Governor-General, himself, the Intendant and his father. 'Twas no slight mission had brought him so far from home.

I was about to speak again, when I noticed a certain tense rigidity in the muscles that lay in beautiful coils and ridges along Tawannears' spine. Simultaneously came a gasp from Corlaer, behind me in the stern of the canoe.

" 'Black Robe!' "

I craned my neck to peer over the Seneca's head. Aye, 'twas so. Behind Le Moyne, sitting as motionless as an image upon the hard, narrow thwart, his death's-head of a face turned full upon us, was the famous Jesuit, Père Hyacinthe. His gnarled, tortured fingers were telling the beads of the rosary that lay across his bony knees. His black soutane fell in straight, severe lines to his sandaled feet. I knew, though I could not see, the terrible scars that the torture-stake had left upon his body, for once in the past he had shown them to me. I knew, too, the man's indomitable hatred

of all things English, his overweening ambition, fortified by iron will and intense religious conviction, to win the whole continent for Louis of France and the Church of Rome.

Of all those who labored with tireless devotion and unerring efficiency to substitute Latin civilization for Anglo-Saxon in the New World, there was none whose aims were more ardently or unselfishly served. Up and down the Wilderness Country he went, always toiling, reckless of hunger, of thirst, of cold, of physical peril. And the savages, with their instinct for the appropriate, had named him Black Robe. By it he was known to many thousands who had never seen him.

A STRANGE man! A man whose mentality had been a little warped by suffering and hardship and overmuch concentration upon ecstatic devotion. Fasting and contemplation, loneliness and self-flagellation, abnegation of all things physical, fire torment and knife torment—these had left their mark upon him. If he did harm, he also did good. He was of those fearless ones who carried the Christian faith to recesses of the Wilderness which will not be known to others until our sons' sons push the frontier a thousand leagues nearer to the sunset. He believed that he had no occasion to bother unduly for food, because God would feed him at need, and certes 'tis true he never died of starvation. A strange man! One to be judged without thought to creed or politics.

His face betrayed no emotion as our canoe drew alongside Le Moyne's, and a marine corporal clutched the gunwale, but his eyes blazed with fanatical intelligence in the deep recesses of their bony sockets. He leaned forward and tapped Le Moyne's shoulder.

"Anti-Christ is come among us," he announced in sepulchral tones. "Here are sons of the English harlot."

Le Moyne frowned slightly. He was a plain soldier-statesman, and no doubt he found it sometimes difficult to accept the priest's high ways. Yet it speaks for Black Robe's influence that he dared not show resentment.

"What mean you, my father?" he asked curtly.

The Jesuit pointed an accusing finger at us.

"Do you not know them, my son?"

"Aye, Tawannears I know. 'Tis the Warden of the Western Door of the Long House. And Corlaer, too, I know. But not the other."

" 'Tis Henry Ormerod, of the Council of the Governor of New York, one of the wiliest minions of the English. He is a renegade from the service of his rightful sovereign, King James, and through him hath held commission from the Regent Orleans."

Of our party I was the only one who could understand this conversation, for Tawannears and Corlaer had no French. It came glibly enough to my tongue, however, after five years service under the Duke of Berwick on the frontiers of the Low Countries and Italy and in Spain. I struck back, therefore, without waiting to consult my comrades.

" 'Tis true, chevalier," I said, "that my name is Ormerod, and Governor Burnet hath honored me with membership of his Council. True, too, that in my youth I was mistaken enough to espouse the cause of the exiled Stuarts, and thus passed some time in France. But that is a page long turned. Whilst I served James I was faithful, and I left him because I came to know that he would never be more than a puppet to gain the ends of a foreign court. Since then I have striven to serve my country as you serve yours. Is there dishonor and hostility in that?"

Le Moyne started to answer me, but Black Robe took the words from his mouth.

"Never heed the Englishman," exclaimed the priest. "He is a servant of evil, a forsworn heretic, an enemy of France."

"There is peace betwixt France and England," I answered boldly. "What talk is this of enemies?"

The priest tossed his arms aloft.

"They talk of peace, peace," he cried. "And there is no peace! Can there ever be peace betwixt anti-Christ and God? Nay, my son. But ask the Englishman what he does, journeying secretly through the territories of France hundreds of leagues from English soil. Why does he travel with the Iroquois chief who is known as the principal friend of the English? Why do we see with him Corlaer, who is the emissary of the English in seducing the savages from trading at our posts. What is his mission here? Has he a passport from Quebec?"

Le Moyne nodded his head.

"There you are correct, father. Monsieur Ormerod, these questions I must have you answer. Where is your passport?"

"I have none," I returned. "Nor do I admit I should have one. I have not traveled territory under the control of France. Since we left Deonundagaa more than a month ago we have not seen a single Frenchman or a sign of French occupation. More, it is not my purpose to enter French territory. I am bound to the farther Wilderness Country, beyond the Great River."

"That, too, is French territory," proclaimed Black Robe. "All this region God hath set aside for the sons of France. No Englishman hath put foot beyond the Great River."

"For that reason, I propose to," I said. "Surely, there is no harm in seeking to know what it is like."

Le Moyne squared his jaw.

"I am not so certain of that, Monsieur Ormerod. But 'tis useless to debate the point here. I fear I must ask you to accompany us to our camping-place. There we will discuss your case more fully, and endeavor to arrive at a composition of our differences. At the worst, I must send you back to New York under escort. No harm shall be done you."

There was nothing else for it. Our plight was hopeless. We were three against near an hundred Frenchman and Indians, and resistance was as unthinkable as flight.

So much I reasoned for myself, and Tawannears and Corlaer agreed with me when I repeated the substance of the conversation as we fell into line behind the French commander's canoe, and wearily retraced our course. We were too disheartened to say much, for we reckoned it probable we should have to do over again what we had already accomplished, and that would mean losing the Summer—and very likely, having to wait over the next Winter. Ahead, I could see Black Robe leaning forward now and then to speak to Le Moyne. A bad omen!

At dusk the flotilla drew inshore to the northern bank a few miles below the mouth of the Ouabache, and we beached our canoe with the others. A file of the regular infantry busied themselves to help us collect wood, and although they did not touch our arms they made us feel that we were prisoners. I tried to draw out the corporal, but gleaned little for my pains. Yes, they had left Le Detroit whilst the snow was still on the ground. They had been to the mouth of the Great River or very near it, to the French post at New Orleans, where the Sieur de Bienville, the Chevalier de Longueuil's brother, was stationed. Now, they were returning by way of Vincennes, Le Detroit, Jagara and Fort Cadaraqui[1] to Montreal.

It had been a trip of inspection, I gathered, typical of the nervous energy of the French Government, not content, as were the rulers of the English colonies, to rest satisfied with a strip of seacoast or the valley of a tidal river, but forever reaching out for new lands to develop and acquire and hold in fee as a heritage for the future—a trip of thousands of leagues by river and forest, under all extremes of heat and cold. And if the humble corporal knew nothing of such high policies, nonetheless I was sure that one of Le Moyne's objects must have been the selection of suitable points for a chain of trading stations and military posts along the line of the Ohio and the Mississippi to link up the New Orleans settlement with Canada, and so bar England once for all from the untapped resources of the Far West beyond the Great River.

Somewhat of these reflections I communicated to my comrades as we ate our evening meal, and we were still discussing the significance of our chance encounter when an ensign came to summon us to Le Moyne. The French Commander was sitting by a fire in a deep glade that ran back from the river's brink toward the forest. Black Robe was standing beside him when we arrived, hot eyes shining uncannily in the glare of the leaping flames, distorted fingers twitching his rosary beads.

"Be seated," said Le Moyne briefly. And then falteringly, in the Seneca dialect: "Tawannears, and you, Corlaer, pardon me if I speak in French to your friend. My tongue has not the knack of the Iroquois speech."

Tawannears bowed with the gracious assent of a prince. Corlaer squeaked, "*Ja.*"

Le Moyne turned to me, his manner hostile, his accent crisp.

"I have been hearing bad things about you, Monsieur Ormerod. The reverend father tells me you are a secret envoy of the English, a spy, in other words, one they send abroad to sow trouble betwixt us and

[1] Afterward Port Frontenac.

the savages. He charges that you are the favorite emissary of Monsieur Burnet and that it is largely due to you the Six Nations have latterly turned against us."

"But, chevalier——"

"I will have no buts, Monsieur Ormerod. It is beyond reason that I should permit such a person as you to travel undisturbed in French territory."

"But is it French territory?" I demanded.

"If the Peace of Utrecht means aught."

"I have heard it said that no two minds were alike on that point," I commented dryly.

He laughed.

"There you are right," he agreed. "Yet it is beside the point. You are a trouble-maker, *monsieur*. I must expel you. Wherever I found you I should expel you."

"Are the French at war with the English?" I asked hotly.

"Not that I have heard. You are later from civilization than I, *monsieur*."

"Then why——"

He brushed the objection aside.

"We deal with realities, Monsieur Ormerod. 'Tis not a question of war but of peace—for France. As I have said, you are a trouble-maker. If I let you wander free, the next time I came this way you might have all the tribes by the ears, united by alliances with the English Crown. Heed me now when I say that France came first into this country, and France shall stay first here."

"But I say I have no interest in this country. I——"

Black Robe bent forward sternly.

"Do not relent, my son," he said to Le Moyne. "The man is dangerous—his companions, too."

"You have heard my decision, father," answered the officer.

I regarded the priest curiously.

"Why do you dislike me?" I asked. "We are on opposite sides, 'tis true, but I have always fought you fair—and once I saved your life."

This was no less than truth, for on a certain occasion, which has nothing to do with this story, the Iroquois would cheerfully have burned Père Hyacinthe but for my strenuous objection. He was in no ways grateful at the time, I am bound to admit, and he did not exhibit gratitude now, as he towered over the camp-fire.

"Poor worm that squirms itself into the path of destiny!" he said harshly. "There is no question of fair fighting or foul fighting betwixt us, nor of gratitude or ingratitude. You serve Anti-Christ. I serve the Heavenly Father. At no place do we touch. We have no interests in common. If you did well, doubt not Holy Peter has recorded the deed for you in his record book. But who are you to prate of good deeds when your soul is steeped in the darkness of heresy, and your eyes are clouded by English lies? Think, rather, on your sins, and it may be you will see light before it is too late."

He turned to Le Moyne.

"My son, I am leaving you now. There is a village of the Ouabaches some miles hence where I have preached the Word. I visit them and will rejoin you at Vincennes."

He turned on his heel and strode off.

"Hold, father," called the officer. "Will you not rest and eat? An escort, surely——"

The answer came from the shadows.

"I do not need an escort when I go upon my Father's business. I have rested all day and I have broken my fast."

"*Peste!*" ejaculated Le Moyne. "'Tis an uncomfortably holy person, Monsieur Ormerod."

"Do I not know it!" I retorted. "This is not the first time, either."

The Frenchman chuckled.

"So I gathered. But come, now, tell me truthfully what is your object; 'twill do you no good to deceive. My hands are bound, as you must know. This wood-ranging is a tedious business, and I have heard naught of politics since I left New Orleans. What bee is buzzing in Burnet's hat?"

I gave him a desperate look. He was a man of good countenance, kindly in reason, iron-willed, pugnacious, intelligent. So I read him. He lounged by the fire obviously bored. There were no others close by save Tawannears and Corlaer, and they were smoking and exchanging small-talk on their own account.

"The truth?" I said. "You shall have it—although 'tis not a story for general telling. You, chevalier, I can see, are a gentleman."

He bowed courteously.

"And for that reason," I went on, "I give you my confidence. 'Tis true, of course, that in my travels I am keeping my eyes open for information useful to my people.

If, for instance, you sent me back to New York I should have to tell at once of meeting this expedition and the deductions I had drawn from it."

"Hah!" said Le Moyne. "I don't know that I shall! I hadn't thought of that."

"Then I should not like to be in your dilemma," I replied. "After all, as Père Hyacinthe told you, I am a member of the Provincial Council. You can't very well incarcerate me without trial in time of peace."

"Get on with your story, Monsieur," he adjured impatiently.

"I am hoping," I pursued, "to learn much of value. No Englishman that I know of hath traversed the Wilderness Country across the Mississippi. I would learn to what extent our people and the French are known to its tribes, and what is their disposition to the English, as also, the value of the land and its geographic condition."

"My faith, *monsieur*, but you are frank!" protested the Frenchman.

"I am trying to be," I said. "But you may believe me or not, chevalier. I should not be here for that reason alone, nor would my comrades yonder."

And I described to him as simply as possible the combination of circumstances which had brought Tawannears, Corlaer and myself upon this venture. 'Twas not a story easily to be compressed, and again and again he drove me off the main trail into byways, for bits of it had come to him in the past—as, for instance, the matter of Gahano's death and the grief of Tawannears—so it was very late when I finished. My comrades were asleep, and over the brow of the shallow glen I could see the groups of sleepers around the dying fires. By the shore where the canoes were beached and at intervals along the edge of the encampment stood the sentinels. Except ourselves, they were the only souls awake.

I looked at them because my eyes were wet. In repeating my story I had resurrected painful memories that the recent weeks had buried. The old wound had reopened. I did not like to think of the house in Pearl Street. At that moment I thought I never wanted to enter it again. I loathed the idea of returning to New York. And I did not want the Frenchman to see my grief.

I was brought back to the present by a crash of sparks as he withdrew a heavy log from the fire, and the flames flared lower.

"Monsieur Ormerod," he said abruptly, "you were good enough to call me a gentleman."

I met his eyes fully—and scarcely dared to believe what I read there.

"I am also," he continued, "a soldier of France. I trust I place my country's interests above my personal vanity, above friendship, above all. But I should not be a Frenchman if I did not recognize courage and the love which spans the worlds. I have learned a lesson from you and your comrades tonight, *monsieur*. I thank you for it. You have made me a better Frenchman, a better soldier, a better Christian."

He made a wry face at this last word.

"Although I shall have trouble convincing Père Hyacinthe on that count," he admitted.

"You mean, chevalier?" I queried breathlessly.

"I mean, Monsieur Ormerod, that I am unable to see how an adventure such as yours can do anything save good. It is an inspiration for brave men of all races. Has it not made me a better Frenchman to hear of it? That sleeping savage there, he is a better Frenchman than I, even so, he, who doubtless, hates my race."

He rose.

"But I am not a sufficiently better Frenchman to dare to seem to flout Père Hyacinthe. Oh, no! Therefore, Monsieur Ormerod, I am going for a walk to inspect the sentries. I shall draw their attention to something by the shore of the lake over to the left. In the mean time, the fire dies. This glen leads into the forest. Your friends are here. I see you have your arms with you. *Monsieur*, I have the honor to tell you it has been a pleasure to meet you. *Adieu!*"

He was gone whilst I was still mumbling my thanks. I heard his hearty voice blustering at the nearest sentries, a running chain of comment along the outskirts of the camp; and I was recalled to my senses. A hand over the mouth of each, and my comrades awoke. Another minute, and crouched double, we were stealing up the glen into the welcome depths of the forest. Five minutes later, and our feet were spurning the leaf-mold as we ran between the trunks, left arms out-stretched before our faces to ward off hanging boughs or vines.

CHAPTER V

THE FATHER OF WATERS

WE HEARD no whooping of aroused savages, as must have attended discovery of our escape; but we dared not trust unduly in Le Moyne's generosity, and we ran throughout the night, steering in a northwesterly direction by the stars, in order to avoid the Ouabache villages and the French post at Vincennes. We came to a halt only when the sunrise showed us to be approaching the verge of the forest country. Beyond the thinning tree trunks a perspective of rolling savannas stretched to the horizon's rim. Not a single tree broke the monotonous outline, and the tall grass rippled under a gentle breeze like the green billows of the ocean.

"We have gone far enough, brothers," said Tawannears. "Out there a man is visible for miles. Let us rest now and make sure we are not followed."

We swung by a pendant grape-vine into the center of a thorny patch of wild berry-bushes, chopped out a space to recline in, arranged the bushes we had demolished in the fashion of a roof so as to preserve the contour of the patch, and abandoned ourselves to sleep. It was noon when we awakened again. Indeed, Tawannears swung himself out of our hidey-hole as I opened my eyes. He was gone for half an hour and returned to announce that he had been unable to find any trace of pursuit along our trail.

"That means we are safe," I exclaimed jubilantly. "Tonight we can steal back to the river and take a canoe from one of the Ouabache villages."

"My brother's wits are clouded," returned Tawannears. "Our enemies will be watching for us to do that very thing."

"*Ja*," agreed Peter, yawning awake. "Andt if we got away they would follow us."

"True talk," said the Seneca. "They would follow us and they would catch us. That way we should lose our scalps."

"Then what can we do?" I demanded.

He pointed to the expanse of the savannahs—or prairies, as the French call them—which we could just see over the tree-tops.

"From here to the Father of Waters, brother, most of the country is like that. Corlaer and Tawannears know, because when we made this journey before, we came all the way by land from the Door of the Long House. The open country begins even farther to the east as you go north toward the Lakes. Over such country we can travel almost as rapidly as in the canoe, and also, brother, we can travel in a straight line. The Ohio twists like a snake and it bears away to the south, so that after it carried us to the Great River we should have to paddle north again against the current, for it is my purpose to make for the country of the Dakota, above the other great river, the Missouri, which pours into the Father of Waters on its west side. Corlaer and Tawannears dwelt a while with the Dakota, before the message came summoning us to return to the Long House, and it is my thought that they might help us farther upon this journey, where other peoples would seek to plunder us or take our scalps."

"You are right, as always, brother," I said. "If Peter agrees, let us start."

Peter heaved himself ponderously to his feet, seized his musket and stood ready for Tawannears to lead the way.

"*Ja*," he squeaked placidly. "Now we get some buffalo-hump."

"What?" I asked, as Tawannears started down the hillock.

"He means the wild cattle of the plains, brother," explained the Seneca. "You have seen their skins in the lodges of my people, and once, the forefathers tell us through the Keeper of the Wampum, the buffalo ranged up to the Doors of the Long House; but now they are seldom seen east of the Ouabache. Their meat is sweet and tender at this time of the year, especially the hump of a young cow. It will be a welcome change after jerked deer-flesh."

"*Ja*," affirmed Corlaer, licking his lips.

AND I was amused to notice the display of vigilance with which he surveyed the country around us as we left the protection of the forest for the open sweep of the savannahs. To be sure, the fat Dutchman was never as dull as he allowed himself to seem, and he had developed the faculties of seeing, hearing, smelling and feeling to a pitch as acute as the savages, which is the highest praise I can offer. But he usually employed his ability without ostentation. Now, he was as palpably interested in his surroundings as I was, and his growing disappointment, as the afternoon waned and we had no sight of a

living creature, was comical. Indeed, he was much put out when I rallied him upon it, and his silence when we halted at evening was gloomily expressive.

Our camp that night was beside a tiny rill of water that trickled along a fold in the rolling waves of earth. There was no underbrush available, let alone trees, and the long prairie grass that grew waist-high was too green to burn readily, so we had no fire. But we did not feel the want of it, for the heat was terrible on the unshaded savannahs. All day the sun had been beating down upon the earth, and all day the earth had been drinking in the heat—to exude it through the night like a dry sweat.

Peter and I came to envy Tawannears his nakedness, and in the morning we stripped off our leathern shirts and rolled them in bundles to sling from the thongs of our food-pouches, suffering the Seneca to coat us with bear's-grease which he carried in a horn-box, a precaution which diminished notably the ardency of the sun's rays, Without its aid my unweathered shoulders must have been broiled pink, whereas under the layer of grease they baked gradually until in days to come they turned a warm brown not unlike the dusky bronze hue of Tawannears, himself.

We had not pushed far this morning when we came upon a broad swath of trampled grass leading from south to north. Hoof-marks showed in the pulverized earth, and Peter's little eyes glistened.

"Buffalo!" he shrilled, excited as a boy. "*Oof*, now we get some nice hump for supper."

Eyes fixed on the horizon, he set off northward at a jog-trot, and Tawannears and I followed him, really as anxious as he to vary the monotony of our diet. Most of our burnt corn and maple-sugar were gone, and we had had scarcely anything but jerked deer-flesh for three days.

"How does he know the buffalo went north?" I questioned. "The trail leads in both directions."

"They always travel north at this season," rejoined Tawannears. "In the Fall of the year they will turn south again. Yes, Peter is right. This grass was trampled only yesterday. They must be near us."

A yelp came from the Dutchman at that moment, and his enormous body crouched forward.

"See!" he cried.

We joined him on the summit of a slight rise. Several miles across the grassy sea moved a desultory procession of brown objects, hundreds of them.

"A large herd," I commented.

Peter gave me a scornful look, and Tawannears laughed.

"Beyond the Father of Waters, brother," said the Seneca, "you will see the buffalo in such myriads as the wild pigeons that flew over the Ohio. The thundering of their hoofs will shake the ground. They will cover the prairie for two days' fast marching."

Peter plucked a blade of grass and tossed it in the air. There was very little wind, but what there was wafted it over our heads.

"Goodt!" he grunted. "Dey are upwindt."

"Will Corlaer stalk the buffalo without assistance?" inquired Tawannears with his customary courtesy.

"One shot is enough," returned Peter, and he lumbered away through the grass, his body huddled over until he was wholly concealed.

I started to sit down to watch the Dutchman's exploit, but Tawannears, with a light of mischief in his eyes, prodded me off to the right, and broke into a run as soon as we had placed one of the deceptive swells of the prairie between us and our comrade.

"What ploy is this?" I panted.

"We will surprize Peter," he answered, laughing. "He thinks to stalk the buffalo, Otetiani, and instead, we will make the buffalo stalk him."

We fetched a wide semicircle northeastward, and came up on the flank of the herd. But before we approached closely Tawannears halted, and we picked bunches of grass which he arranged on our heads, so that at even a short distance we were indistinguishable from our grassy background. Then we continued, working slowly around the flank of the herd until we were in its rear. Corlaer was nowhere to be seen.

"Now, brother!" said Tawannears.

He cast off his head-dress, and advanced openly upon the animals. I imitated him, and an old bull gave a bellow of warning. A medley of noises answered the alarm, mooing of cows and bleating of frightened calves and over all the bellowing of other bulls. The herd milled around and gave ground before us. Tawannears waved his arms, and it broke into a run.

"They will go over Peter!" I exclaimed.

"No," answered Tawannears. "If it were a large herd, perhaps. But we have only made it easier for Peter, who said he needed no help. He will shoot into the herd when it approaches him, and the buffalo will split right and left on either side of him."

The herd topped the first swell to the south, and a shot boomed suddenly.

"Watch!" said Tawannears.

The frenzied mass of huge, shaggy creatures divided as if a giant sword had sliced down from the blazing sky overhead. I ran up the slope behind them and reached its brow in time to see the halves reunite a quarter of a mile farther on. Directly beneath me lay the body of a fat cow, and Peter already was at work upon it with his knife. Tawannears raised the war-whoop, but Peter carved stolidly on.

"*Ja*," he remarked when we joined him, "you think you put der choke on Peter, eh? Well, you don't. I look back once, andt I don't see you. Andt den der herd begins to mofe, andt it stampedes. 'Ho,' I said to myself. 'Funny tricks! *Ja*, funny tricks.' But I shoot me der best cow in der lot, yust der same. We hafe some nice hump for supper. *Ja*."

FORTUNATELY for Peter's appetite, we were able to camp that night in a grove of dwarf trees that bordered a small river, and the broiled buffalo hump was all that he had anticipated. We seized the opportunity afforded by a plentiful supply of firewood to jerk the balance of the choice cuts, about four stone in weight, which detained us in the grove all of the next day. Of course, we could not make a thorough job of it, but it sufficed to preserve the meat untainted in that searing heat for three or four days longer, and at the end of that time we had worked into a different kind of country where game was more plentiful.

Here lush meadows alternated with dense patches of low timber and swamps and bottomlands, these latter back-waters of the river, which were forest-covered, yet never completely drained. The increasing natural difficulties slowed our pace, and we were three days in traversing this broken country; but Tawannears encouraged us with the assurance that it indicated our nearness to the Great River, which always in the Spring inundated the lands along its course, sometimes for many miles.

This country was neither pleasant nor healthful by contrast with the cool forests and open savannas we had known, and we were pestered unmercifully by a plague of gnats. But on the other hand we were never at a loss for fresh meat. We knocked over squirrels with sticks and dragged the wild turkeys from their roosts at night. There was a kind of partridge, too, that plumped up under our feet, a stupid bird easily to be slain with the tomahawk. And one time a black bear barred our path and stood growling at us. We let him go, for we needed no meat and we must husband our powder.

The third day we waded knee-deep through a flooded forest-tract and came without warning upon the margin of a wide, brown stream. I hailed it for the Mississippi, at last; but Tawannears asserted it to be the Illinois, a tributary, which flowed down from the vicinity of the Lake of the Michigans and entered the Mississippi opposite to, and a short distance above the Missouri. This knowledge was valuable, inasmuch as it told us approximately where we were, and we turned back to nominally dry ground and headed southwest, following the general trend of the Illinois. But our progress was slower than ever, for the luxuriance of the undergrowth in those moist lowlands baffles description. Briers tore our skin; creepers tripped us; bushes grew so thickly that we had to hack our way step by step, taking turns at trail-breaking.

The next day we won to higher ground, a ridge from which we caught occasional glimpses of the Illinois; and in mid-afternoon we stumbled unawares upon a trail that led from the northeast and straddled the saddle of the ridge.

"Back!" muttered Tawannears, as we smashed carelessly through the brushwood into the grooved slot.

Ostensibly, the trail was deserted. A lightning glance revealed it a vacant, green-walled tunnel. But appearances meant nothing in the Wilderness, and we slid behind a fallen trunk, straining our ears for sounds of other men. Bees buzzed over us in the soft yellow light. We heard water running somewhere. Birds sang in the tree-tops. That was all. Minute by minute, we waited—for the purr of an arrow, the crash of a shot, the yell of the

war-whoop. But nothing happened, and at last Tawannears motioned for us to crawl after him to a position offering ready access to the choked lands on the river side of the ridge. There he left us, to scout the neighborhood alone. An hour passed, as Peter and I knelt back to back in the underbrush, our eyes roaming the woods on every side. Another hour, and I became restless. Evening was darkening when the hoot of an owl announced Tawannears' approach. He crawled into our lair, and dropped a worn moccasin in Peter's lap.

"Chippewa," he murmured.

Peter nodded confirmation, slowly turning the footgear in his pudgy hands.

"A war-party," continued Tawannears. "They were going across the Father of Waters. Their foot-prints all point toward the river."

"Der trail is fresh?" queried Corlaer.

"I found the ashes of a fire two days old," returned the Seneca. "It is my counsel that we lie here until morning. I think the Chippewas are planning to cross the Great River to hunt for Dakota scalps and buffalo robes. The Dakota are my brothers. They are brave warriors, but they have no muskets. The Chippewas are allies of the French. They have muskets, and it is easier for them to steal furs from the Dakota than to hunt the wild creatures themselves. Let us give them time to cross the river. Afterward we will follow them and carry a warning to the Dakota."

Morning brought rain, and we were afoot with the light, avoiding the trail itself, slinking by preference through the woods parallel to it. It was a weary day of physical discomfort and cautious progress, but we had our reward. In the late afternoon we splashed out of a backwater to emerge upon a shelving bluff, grassy and well-timbered. From its western edge we stared at a vast yellow sea, its farther shore dim under driving sheets of rain.

"The Father of Waters," said Tawannears.

I gasped. Miles wide the yellow waters rolled as far as the eye could see. Sullen, threatening, overpowering in its surge and breadth, the river pulsed along with a majestic rhythm almost like a living thing.

"But how shall we cross it?" I stammered.

Tawannears waved a hand toward the saplings that crowded the bluff.

"We have our hatchets. We must build a raft."

We chose for our camp the site the Chippewas had occupied, a recess under the bluff that had been dug by the Spring freshets when the water was higher even than now, and the débris of their raft-building told my comrades that they had not numbered more than twenty or thirty, an ordinary raiding party of young warriors. It was too late to begin work then on the raft, but in the morning, with sunshine to hearten us, we fell to with our hatchets and chopped down a score or two of sturdy young trees, dragged them to a point just above water-level, and left them there, whilst we invaded the backwaters to collect grape-vines and other creepers, which we carried back to the bluff by the armload.

These were Tawannears' materials, and under his direction we formed them into a remarkably buoyant raft. His theory was to take a number of saplings and bind them one to another. On these transversely he placed a second layer, which were first bound together and then stanchly fastened to the bottom layer. Two additional layers were superimposed upon these, with the result that he had a high-riding, practically water-tight conveyance, ample to float all three of us. The one difficulty we foresaw was in forcing our way across the current, and we met this as well as we could by whittling crude paddles and poles for pushing in shallow water. We were vastly proud of our achievement when we wiped the sweat from our eyes after two days of labor and admired the raft as it rode to a withe cable hitched to a convenient stump.

"She floats as grandly as a frigate," I exclaimed.

"And no snag can sink her," added Tawannears. "The Father of Waters is conscious of his might. He is jealous of those who would travel him. He has knives hidden in his bosom to wreck the unwary, but we——"

"Hark!" interrupted Corlaer, hand upraised.

From inland came the crashing noise made by a heavy body moving carelessly through the undergrowth, the mutter of a voice unrestrained. We snatched up our rifles and ran to cover. It was useless to think of flight on the raft. An enemy could riddle us as we strove to force its unwieldy bulk out into the stream. No, our only chance was to stand to it, conscious that we had our backs to the river and therefore

could not be surrounded. Perhaps night would furnish an opportunity for us to escape by dropping down with the current—if we were not overwhelmed by numbers before that. Only a strong force, unafraid, would crash toward us in that reckless way. It was like white men, not Indians. The thought sent a shiver down my spine. I rolled over beside Tawannears.

"Is it the French, brother?" I asked.

"We shall soon see," he answered grimly. "Some one is walking there between the trees—to your right."

CHAPTER VI

WE CROSS THE GREAT RIVER

A DARK object showed in the sun-flecked greenery of the woods. Tawannears thrust forward his musket, and sighted along the barrel.

"He is alone," murmured Peter.

"Then there will be none to tell his story," remarked Tawannears grimly. "But Corlaer must not be too sure. He may be the bait to a trap."

The strange figure strode into an opening bathed in the warm sunlight, and I had a brief vision of a fluttering black habit and a white blob of a face.

"It is Black Robe!" I cried softly.

Tawannears cuddled his gun to his cheek.

"Hawenneyu has delivered him into our hands," he commented. "If I miss, Corlaer must shoot before he can run."

"*Ja*," grunted Peter.

"No, no," I exclaimed. "There must be no shooting."

"He is an enemy," answered Tawannears, unmoved. "He hates us. Why should my brother care whether he lives or dies?"

"But he has done nothing to us that advantaged him," I argued. "He does not even know that we are here."

"Perhaps he does," said Tawannears. "Perhaps he has followed us, when Le Moyne refused to do so. Perhaps his Ouabaches and Miamis lurk behind him."

"He is alone," repeated Peter. "But just der same we better shoot him. He is no goodt."

"It would be murder," I insisted. "We shall serve no object by killing him. What harm can he do us? In a few hours we shall have passed the river where his Indians can not reach us."

The Jesuit was in full view, advancing almost directly toward us, his eyes on the blue horizon. He was chanting to himself in a deep, sonorous voice, and as he drew nearer I identified the words of the Vesper Hymn:

". . . mens gravata crimine,
Vitae sit exul munere,
Dum nil perenne cogitat,
Seseque culpis illigat."

"I am going to speak to him," I said. "It can do no harm. He does not know we are here. Why, Tawannears, the man is fearless. He would walk straight into your musket, and defy you to shoot. Moreover, he has withstood the torture more than once, and I do not think he is right in his head. Would you be proud of killing one whose mind the Great Spirit had wrapped in a cloud?"

Tawannears was all Indian, despite his perfect English and the erudition he had absorbed from his missionary teachers. Corlaer, after a life among the red men, had imbibed many of their prejudices. My last remark turned the scale. A man whose mentality had been touched was sacred to any tribe.

The Seneca smiled unwillingly.

"Otetiani is a strong pleader. Very well. Let Black Robe live. But if he meditates treachery we must kill him, even though Hawenneyu has set him aside among men."

"He is alone," declared Peter for the third time. "Always he trafels alone. I know it. But he is no friendt to us. We watch him, eh?"

"Surely," I agreed. "He is a Frenchman and our enemy. That I do not deny. But he can not harm us. Come, we will ask him his business here. Afterwards, if necessary, we will keep watch on him."

Black Robe had halted some thirty yards south of our hiding-place, and stood now on the edge of the bluff, surveying the wonderful prospect of the unbridled river, its yellow waters glistening in the sunlight, the opposite bank a low green wall two miles or more away. His lips moved in words I could not hear, and he dropped to his knees in the attitude of prayer, head bowed, and remained so many minutes, his body rigid with the ecstasy of devotion.

I waited until he had risen again, then stepped from our hiding-place and walked toward him. Tawannears and Corlaer followed me. He saw us almost at once, but

he made no sign of surprize. He simply stood, facing us, his terribly maimed hands locked in front of him, his spare frame vibrant with the suppressed energy of the indomitable spirit within him.

"So you came this way," he said harshly. "I thought as much, but they would not listen to me."

"And you, Père Hyacinthe?" I asked. "Where do you go?"

"I go upon my Father's business," he answered in the phrase I had heard him use more than once before.

"Alone?"

His pallid, riven face cracked in what I suppose he intended for a smile of sarcasm.

"Shall I take with me such guards as attend the Holy Father when he rides in state? No, but I am guarded, Englishman. Cohorts of angels attend me. The cherubim chant me on my way. It suffices."

"I do not seek to probe your affairs," I replied as politely as I could, "but you are our enemy. We do not wish to harm you, yet we must protect ourselves."

"You can not harm me," he said without irritation. "Enemy? No, my erring son, I am not your enemy—or, rather, say I am enemy only to the evil that hath possession of you. But content yourself. I have come many miles this day, and I saw no living thing, save the beasts of the forest."

I was satisfied, for I knew it was not in the priest to lie.

"Have you food?" I asked.

"Food?" he repeated doubtfully, almost as if he had not understood me. "No, but I shall eat."

"If a heretic's food—" I began.

"Heaven's grace is vouchsafed in divers ways," he cut me off curtly. "It may be this opportunity has been given you to find an escape from sin. I will eat your food, Englishman."

Tawannears and Peter listened sullenly to my invitation, and their faces expressed neither welcome nor toleration as the Jesuit walked back with us to the recess under the bluff.

His hollow eyes lighted with unusual interest when he spied our raft.

"You are crossing the Great River, Monsieur Ormerod?"

He seemed tricked out of his dour mannerisms for the moment. His voice took on the casual courtesy of one gentleman to another. But it was a fleeting manifestation, no doubt an echo from some long-buried past.

"Yes," I said, "as I told the chevalier——"

"Strange," he interrupted me abruptly, his old manner returning, "that you of all men should be appointed to aid in the fulfilling of my mission. How inscrutable are God's ways! Yet there must be a meaning in this. Blessed Virgin, aid me!"

My comrades would have nothing to do with him. They took their food and removed out of ear-shot, leaving me to do the honors, which was only fair, inasmuch as I had foisted him upon them. But it insured an ill evening for me, for Black Robe utilized the opportunity to examine me at length upon my religious convictions—sketchy, at best, I fear, after a lifetime of wandering—, and read me a lecture upon the errors of my creed. I marvel much as I look back upon that incident. In many ways I hold he was wrong, but of all men I have known as well I must account him the most holy. He knew not the meaning of the word self-interest. Life for him was service of the Word of God, as he understood it. He wasted no time in the search of Truth, for he held that it was ready to hand, ay, inscribed in letters of fire across the skies for all men to see.

He talked to me for hours after the others slept, and I listened with undiminished interest to the end. The man's stern conviction was an inspiration, whether you agreed with him or not. And if some hold me religiously a weakling because I grant him the merit of believing what he preached, my answer is that such as he was, he—and many others like him—was one of the most potent forces in carrying the rule of the white man into the Wilderness Country. If he and his fellows did not convert the savages, at least they taught them the strength of the white man's will, and by their pioneering endeavor they taught their own people the worth of the unknown lands that always lie beyond the horizon's rim.

IN THE night the weather shifted, and the morning was overcast and blustery, with a changeable wind. We debated whether we should trust ourselves to the raft under such conditions, and Tawannears and Peter advised against it until Black Robe derided their fears.

"What?" he cried in the Seneca dialect,

which came readily to him, he having been long a missionary to the People of the Long House. "Is the Warden of the Western Door afraid to go upon the waters? Is Corlaer fearful lest he wet his moccasins? You have dared all manner of perils over hundreds of leagues, and now you wince at a few leagues of water! Pluck up your courage! I am the wreck of what was a man, yet I am not afraid. Will you let me daunt you?"

"Black Robe does not know what he says," replied Tawannears stiffly. "A silly little bird has whistled idle thoughts in his ear. He knows well that Tawannears does not fear even the Master of Evil, Hanegoategeh, whom Black Robe serves."

Peter said nothing, after his fashion, but his little eyes squinted thoughtfully, and presently he drew us aside.

"If Black Robe is touched in der head we might be safe," he proposed.

"Nonsense," I retorted impatiently. "What has that to do with whether the wind blows or the waters rise? It is dangerous out there on the raft or it is not. Black Robe has nothing to do with it."

"My brother Otetiani may be right," said Tawannears, "yet he has said that the Great Spirit has taken Black Robe under his protection. If that is true, will Hawenneyu allow him to drown?"

"Perhaps not," I admitted, "but we might drown whilst he escaped."

"Otetiani speaks with a straight tongue," affirmed the Seneca. "Nevertheless I say that we can not let Black Robe put a slight upon us. There is danger on the bosom of the Father of Waters. But if we do not venture forth Black Robe will laugh at us, and perhaps some day he will tell the story to his people. Let us go."

I shrugged my shoulders. I did not like the look of the river. It was roughening every minute. But neither could I resist the quaint logic of Tawannears, and of course, no man enjoys being told he is afraid.

"Have it your own way," I said at last.

Tawannears walked up to the priest.

"We go," he said quietly. "If we die, remember that you urged us forth."

One of those rare reflections of a personality long submerged shone in the Jesuit's face. He dropped his hand upon the Seneca's bare shoulder.

"There is naught to fear," he said gently. "God watches over us on the water as on the land. If He has ordained for you to die, you will die. The good warrior thinks not upon death, but upon his mission."

His manner changed. His hand dropped by his side. His voice became harsh.

"Heathen, would you blame me for your wickedness? As well do so as charge me with your death! You and I have no power over life! Look up! Look up, I say! There is the Power that decides all. Ha, you fear —you fear what you know not!"

His face a study in masked fury, Tawannears strode to the side of the raft, drew his knife and laid the keen edge against the mooring withe.

"Tawannears waits," he said.

Black Robe stepped aboard without a word. Peter and I climbed after him, and the Seneca severed the withe with a single slash. We piled our muskets, powder-horns and pouches upon a raised frame-work in the center of the unwieldy craft, where they would be out of the reach of the water, and took to the pushing poles, the Jesuit lending a hand, and shoved out into the current.

The raft rode high, as we had expected, but its heavy weight made it drag fearfully in the slack water under the bank. We bent all our strength on the poles, yet the headway we achieved was trifling. Sagging, lurching, its component trees rustling and squelching, it crawled forward a foot or two at a time. A sandbar held us up for an hour, and after an unsuccessful effort to push across, we finally contrived to float around it. Then we resumed the battle, and half-naked as we were, the sweat poured from us and our muscles ached. How Black Robe endured it I do not know. Of us all he alone did not sweat, but he worked unflinchingly until the moment, when, without warning, a monstrous force seemed to seize upon the raft.

There was a swirl, a peculiar sucking noise—and the shore began to recede. The raft wavered crazily, twirled about, started across the current and as abruptly was spun back downstream. We stood stupidly, leaning on our poles, scarcely realizing what had happened.

"The river does our work for us, it seems," I remarked.

Tawannears shook his head, a worried expression in his eyes.

"No, brother, the worst is ahead of us. The river is like a wild beast today."

"*Ja*," squeaked Corlaer, striking his pole down in a futile effort to find bottom.

Black Robe remained by himself on the forepart of the raft, his gaze on the mirky distance where he appeared to be able to see landscapes that were denied to our earth-bound spirits.

"We can work across the current," I suggested. "It may take time, but——"

A yellow-brown wave, its crest tipped with scum, slapped against the side of the raft and spattered our feet. Another rolled in from the opposite quarter and lapped over the side. The structure of the raft groaned and shifted.

"It will take many hours," answered Tawannears. "Our work has just begun."

We got out the rough paddles we had carved and undertook to steer diagonally with the current, but experience proved that a consistent course was impossible of attainment. We made distance in the desired direction—and were promptly picked up by an eddy and tossed back again, or else the vagrant wind set in to toy with us. The waves rolled higher constantly, and we were wet to the waist. But we fought on, and the longer we fought the more intelligent our efforts became.

There was a trick to this work, a trick entirely different from navigating a light, amenable, birchen canoe. Our raft had a will of its own, and a certain sense of decency. Handled as it desired to be, it would even accomplish a measure of our desires, and gradually we came to learn its ways. This aided us in winning ground—or, I should say, water; but nothing could aid us in conflicting the capricious moods of wind and current. Sometimes we had both behind us, and then we were driven rapidly down-stream. Again, the wind would come from the quarter and mitigate somewhat the effect of the current. Mid-afternoon found us with nothing gained beyond a hazardous mid-stream course that was varied by occasional wild lurches in the direction of one shore or the other.

When the current discharged us towards the eastern bank we battled desperately against it. When, in one of its incomprehensible moments of beneficence, it started us in the desired direction we labored with gritting teeth to assist it. And every time this happened it ended by spinning us around and starting us back the way we had come. Night shut down upon us miles from our starting place, but less than half-way across.

SLEEP, of course, was unthinkable. We were wet. We had little edible food. But tired as we were, we were still unwilling to suspend for a minute our struggle against the river. Moreover, we now required all our vigilance, for the waters were laden with other floating objects, sinister, half-sunken projectiles that had been trees and were now the instruments of the river's revenge or wrath. One of these, a giant hulk of wood, careened against us in the faint star-light and partially demolished the structure upon which we had placed our arms and superfluous clothing. We narrowly escaped losing all our store of powder in this misadventure, and the shock had noticeable effect in loosening the fabric of the raft. It developed an increasing sluggishness, a more frequent tendency to lurch uncertainly, and our attempts to direct its progress became ridiculously inept.

But we did not desist. The night was cool, but we sweated as we had on the broiling savannas, and tapped unknown reservoirs of strength to maintain our fight. We seldom spoke to one another. There was little occasion for words, except once in a while to shout a warning. And Black Robe paddled and poled beside us, hour by hour. I do not remember that he ever spoke that night. We were afraid, frankly, openly afraid, admitting it tacitly one to another. But I am sure that he was as serenely indifferent to fate as he had been in prodding us to start. He was the only one who did not croak hoarse exultation when the river played its last trick upon us.

This came just after sunrise. We had felt for the past hour an erratic swirl in the eddying current. Now we sighted a mile or so ahead of us to the right the mouth of another river, little narrower than the Mississippi.

"That is the Missouri, brothers!" exclaimed Tawannears. "We are far down-stream. If we are carried beyond this we shall land in the country of the Mandans, who are enemies of the Dakota and eaters of human flesh. Hawenneyu has veiled his face from us!"

But at that instant Hawenneyu withdrew the veil and smiled upon us. What happened, I think, was that the incoming stream of the Missouri, meeting the torrent

of the Mississippi, combined with the Great River to form a whirlpool of eddies, with a backshoot toward the western bank. At any rate, we were suddenly spun about like a chip in a channel, so rapidly that it was dizzying. Nothing that we could do had any influence upon the course of the raft. We tried to work against the eddies for several moments, and finally gave it up in disgust, determined to meet whatever doom was in store for us without flinching.

Our reward was to be impelled at most amazing speed toward the west bank. Twice on our way we were caught and torn at by opposing eddies, but each time the raft worked free of its own volition, and the rising sun saw us floating, water-logged and bedraggled in a backwater under the western bank, perhaps half a mile above the mouth of the Missouri.

We were still a long way from shore, of course, and it required two hours of steady poling to work us through the sandbars to within wading distance of the river's edge; but we made it. We shouldered our muskets and staggered ashore to collapse upon the bank just above the water-level—all except Black Robe. Without a glance at us or the sodden remnants of the raft that had carried him here, without even a casual inspection of the country before him, he climbed the bank and strode westward. He had not slept through the night; he had eaten only a bare handful of food since morning; he had labored as hard as we had.

I called after him, but he dismissed me with an impatient wave of the hand. The last I saw of him his black figure was outlined sparsely against a low wood. There was an uncompromising air to his back I did not like, but I could not have pursued him to save myself. Tawannears and Peter were stretched inert upon the bank beside me, their eyes closed in sleep. I hesitated—and sank beside them.

CHAPTER VII

THE COUNTRY OF THE DAKOTA

"WAKE, brother, wake!"

The words rang faintly in my ears. Mingled with them was a peculiar underlying sound. *Pop! Pop! Pop!* it went, and rippled off into the noise a wood fire makes when it is burning merrily.

I was conscious of being shaken, resented it, tried to pull away—and reluctantly awoke. Tawannears was bending over me, clutching my shoulder. His face showed relief as I sat erect.

"Otetiani slept as though he were already in the Halls of the Honochenokeh," he said. "Hark!"

Stupified as I was, I realized that the peculiar sound which had helped to rouse me from the slumber of exhaustion was the steady crackle of musketry.

"Black Robe!" I exclaimed.

Tawannears shook his head.

"It may be so, but the firing is not at us, brother. Come, let us join Corlaer."

I stood up, musket in hand, and for the first time was aware of the soreness of muscle, joint and sinew. Every inch of my body seemed to cherish its special ache or twinge.

"We are in no condition for fighting," I remarked glumly.

"The warrior fights when he must," returned Tawannears sententiously. "Hasten brother. Corlaer waits us."

I climbed after him toward the top of the bank where I could barely see the Dutchman's big form huddled in the grass that grew as high as our waists. The sun was declining in the western sky. The wind was negligible. The Mississippi, behind us, was as calm as a ditch-pond, and in the clear, warm sunlight the opposite shore looked absurdly near. It was difficult to believe that our battle to cross it had ended only that morning.

From the crest of the bank an entirely different prospect appeared. Crawling into the grass beside Peter, Tawannears and I peered cautiously over its rustling tips to the wall of the low wood in which Black Robe had vanished. This wood was half a mile distant. Between it and the river-bank stretched an open meadow. Another half-mile to our left a few scattered clumps of bushes denoted the bank of the Missouri. We were ensconced upon one side of a triangle of land at the intersection of the two rivers, and it was obvious that the fighting going on under cover of the wood was working down into this open triangle. Apparently one body of men were seeking to drive a second body into the *cul de sac* of the triangle.

Even as my mind formulated this theory there was a flash of color on the edge of the

wood and a figure darted into the open. It was an Indian, a tall man, wearing a headdress of feathers such as I had never seen before, a bonnet that encircled the head and reached down between his shoulders, giving him an exaggerated effect of height. He leaped back behind a tree as we watched, fitted an arrow to his bow and loosed it into the recesses of the wood. Then he turned and ran. He had not covered a dozen yards when a shot was fired, and he bounded high in air and fell upon his face.

Other men, similarly dressed, leaped into view, pausing momentarily to take advantage of the last cover of the wood to loose their arrows against whoever was pursuing them. There must have been a score of them, I suppose, all fine, tall warriors, naked but for breechclout, moccasins and headdress; and they ran like antelope across our range of vision. From the wood came occasional reports, and a second man plunged to the ground. We heard a shrill yelping.

"Dakota," grunted Tawannears.

"What does it mean?" I asked.

He pushed his musket into position.

"Be patient, brother. Let us see what happens next."

Other figures broke from the wood, whooping and firing after the fleeing Dakota, who, their bows hopelessly out-ranged, made no attempt at resistance, but raced for the protection of the Missouri bank.

"Chippewa!" squeaked Corlaer.

Tawannears nodded, frowning.

"They are the war-party who crossed the Great River ahead of us," he agreed. "What shall we do, brothers? The Chippewa are allies of the French. Corlaer and Tawannears have spent many months in the teepees of the Dakota. But the odds are heavy against our Dakota brothers. If we cast our lot with them we may lose our own scalps."

"We are in sore danger, no matter which way we turn," I retorted. "The Chippewa would show us no mercy at any time. I am for aiding the Dakota. If we can save them they will be all the more eager to help us on our venture, as you suggested before."

"*Ja*," assented Corlaer. "Andt we gife dose Chippewa a surprize, eh?"

"We must give them death," answered Tawannears grimly.

He made good his words as he spoke; and I brought down a second man. Corlaer waited until I had almost finished reloading, and secured two men in a row for target, hitting one in the shoulder and drilling the other through the body. Firing at ease, with our guns in rest, we could not miss; and the Chippewa, with howls of rage, promptly went to cover in the long grass.

This marked the initiation of a second phase of the engagement. The Chippewa were excellent marksmen, and when Corlaer took his second shot they deluged him with bullets that dug up the sods around him and sent him rolling down the bank, spitting dirt out of his mouth. Tawannears and I slid after him, deeming discretion preferable to valor.

If our fusillade had astonished the Chippewa it had been equally disconcerting to the Dakota. They did not know what to make of it. At first they seemed to fear a trap, but when they marked the furious discharge of their enemies that drove us over the bank they evidently decided we must be friends, and struck off from their line of flight at right angles so as to accommodate a union of forces with us.

We, on our part, were concerned to effect this union and at the same time compel the Chippewa to hold off long enough to permit us an opportunity to concert a plan of strategy with the Dakota band. So after trotting a rod down-river we reclimbed the bank and poured a second volley into the line of Chippewa, whose crouching figures were only half-concealed by the waving grass-tips. Before they could shift their aim from the position we had formerly occupied we had slid down the bank and were making for a new vantage-point.

By means of such tactics we were able to force the Chippewa to an advance as slow as it was cautious, for they dared not expose themselves unduly after the punishment we had inflicted in the beginning, and we secured time to work down-river to where the remnants of the Dakota band hugged the protection of the bank, arrows notched, and curious glances mirroring the suspicion they still entertained of such unexpected rescuers. But their suspicion faded as we came close enough for them to identify Tawannears and the immense body of the Dutchman.

Their chief, a sinewy giant of forty, with a high-beaked nose and keen, direct gaze, his headdress of golden eagle's feathers, stepped forward to greet us, a light of

welcome on his face; and both my friends exclaimed at sight of him.

"Do you know him?" I panted eagerly.

"He is Chatanskah,[1] Chief of the Wahpeton Council Fire," answered Tawannears briefly. "Many a buffalo he has stalked with Corlaer and Tawannears."

Chatanskah exchanged a few curt sentences with Tawannears, who nodded agreement with what he said, and then led his warriors at a dead run toward the junction of the two rivers—the apex of the triangle over which this fighting ranged. The Seneca motioned for us to follow them.

"Haste, brothers!" he urged. "We must trick the Chippewa. It is Chatanskah's plan to seek the protection of the wood where it approaches the Missouri bank, nearly opposite here."

But this was not so easy of accomplishment as it sounded. The Chippewa soon appreciated our intent, and we had not doubled the apex of the blunt promontory, with its glacis of mudflats, when they tumbled over the Mississippi bluff and pelted us with lead. Others headed across the meadow which constituted the heart of the triangle thinking to cut us off as we bounded its outer edge, but Tawannears, Corlaer and I crawled to the top of the Missouri bluff and drove them to cover again. And at last, by dint of this and similar desperate ploys, we were enabled to scramble up the Missouri bank in the rear of our allies and dash across a narrow belt of grass land into the green shelter of the wood, a shower of balls slicing the boughs about our shoulders.

HERE we were reasonably safe, and Tawannears explained the situation to us whilst the Dakota produced meat from their pouches, and we snatched a hasty meal as the evening shadows lengthened.

"This wood runs west and north for a mile," he said. "Beyond it the country is all open, buffalo grazing-ground where the Dakota were hunting when the Chippewa surprized them this afternoon. It is Chatanskah's counsel that we hold the wood until it is dark when we can afford to risk taking to the prairie. The Dakota villages are a long day's——"

He was interrupted by the resumption of the Chippewa's attack. They had massed all their men behind the Missouri bank in front of us, and fired into the wood as rapidly as they could load and reload. Bullets *phutted!* into the trees, swished through the branches and whistled in the air. I was long to remember the sinister song they sang, for years were to pass before I was again obliged to stand up to the battering of musketry. The racket was awesome, yet it achieved remarkably little harm. One of the Dakota abandoned shelter to loose an arrow and sagged to the ground with a bullet in his lungs. Otherwise we were scatheless so far.

The firing increased in volume. It became a hell of fury, and we could hear the Chippewa yelling encouragement to one another. Smoke clouds billowed out from the bank in thick, cottony puffs, and suddenly Chatanskah screeched a warning. The smoke clouds seemed to vomit forth low-running figures, musket in one hand, tomahawk in the other. But this was a chance for which Tawannears, Peter and I had been waiting, and we made our shots count. Our allies, too, were not dismayed. In the smoky dusk, at such short distances, the bow was on more than equal terms with the musket.

The Chippewa did not dare to stop to reload. They were obliged to rely upon the covering fire of the half-dozen comrades who had remained behind the bank, and these found it impossible to aim because of the heavy smoke that the dying wind could not disperse. The Dakota bows boomed with savage joy. All around us I heard the tense, twanging hum of the strings, the prolonged *his-ss-s-tsst!* of the arrows. Out in the open men tossed their arms aloft and dropped with arrows in their bowels, or fell kicking and coughing, pierced in the throat, or went straight over backward with a bunch of feathers standing up just over their hearts.

The attack faltered and gave ground, and the Dakota warriors burst from the wood. Two of them collapsed before a ragged volley from the river-bank, but there was no stopping them. They swept over the field with tomahawk and scalping-knife, and their arrows drove the surviving Chippewa out upon the mudflats, where they would have followed if Chatanskah had not called them in, fearful of an ambuscade in the gathering darkness.

That was a proud night for the Dakota

[1] White Hawk.

band. The youngest warrior counted coup, for the Chippewa had lost two-thirds of their number. But what pleased our new friends the most was not their tale of scalps, but the eighteen French firelocks that were theirs for lifting from the ground. It was the biggest haul of war-booty their tribe had ever taken, of incalculable military value, as the future was soon to show. Moreover, that battle in the triangle between the two rivers, obscure though it was, became famous in the annals of the plains tribes, as proving that under favorable circumstances they could stand up to the forest tribes from the east side of the Mississippi, despite the better arms of the forest warriors. And many chiefs, who up to that time had concentrated their efforts upon stealing horses branched out into elaborate schemes for procuring musketry.

Weary as his men were—and we no less than they—Chatanskah would not allow them to camp on the scene of their victory. Loaded with the spoil, which was considerable, including, besides the muskets, their equipment of powder-horns and shot-pouches, knives, tomahawks and other weapons, the band trotted through the wood and out upon the open prairie beyond. With the rising moon to light them they headed inland from the Missouri, bearing northwest by the stars, and doggedly maintained the pace until I guessed it to be midnight. Then Chatanskah consented to make camp, without fires, and set guards for the balance of the night. Tawannears offered to have us take our share of this duty, but the Dakota chief would not hear of it.

"What?" he exclaimed. "Shall a guest be asked to wait upon himself? Chatanskah and his warriors were as good as dead men when Tawannears and his white brothers came to their rescue. We owe you our lives. And now you shall sit in the center of my teepee. My squaws shall wait upon you. My young men shall hunt you game. Our old men shall tell you stories of the long-ago. If you will stay with us we will find you maidens to suit your eyes, and we will make strong medicine to turn the white brothers red, and you shall become chief of the Dakota. Then the tribe will prosper and grow mighty in war."

His eyes gleamed as he conjured up that picture of prowess.

"That is a plan worth considering, my brother of the Hodenosaunee," he went on. "We will raid the Chippewa, the Miami, the Potawotomi, the Illinoi, the Shawnee for guns. We will steal horses from the Spaniards and the tribes below the Missouri. We will grow great, brother."

"My brother forgets," Tawannears answered gently. "When I was among the Dakota before I told of a search I had undertaken."

"True," the Dakota assented, crestfallen. "And does Tawannears still pursue that search?"

"Yes, brother. My white brothers go with me. We seek the Land of Lost Souls, which the old tales of my people say is beyond the sunset."

The Dakota shrugged his powerful shoulders.

"It may be. My people know nothing of it."

Tawannears hesitated, and I who knew him so well, recognized that he dreaded to press the question. But his will triumphed over his spiritual fear.

"Has Chatanskah asked any warriors from afar if they know of the Land of Lost Souls?"

"Chatanskah never forgets a promise to a friend," returned the Dakota. "Many times I have spoken with the brothers of the Dakota Council-fires that stretch toward the Sky Mountains. What is beyond those mountains they do not know. This land you speak of may be there. But they do not know. No warrior has ever gone far across the mountains and returned. A large band dies of hunger and thirst. A few warriors are killed by the people of the rocky places."

"Yet Tawannears and his white brothers will go there," the Seneca declared.

"If you go, you will die," replied Chatanskah. "It will be much better to stay with Chatanskah and became a great chief."

"Nevertheless, Tawannears must go on," insisted Tawannears. "My brother of the Dakota has said that he owes us his life. Will he pay the debt he owes by aiding us on our way?"

The Dakota bowed his head.

"Chatanskah may not deny what Tawannears and his white brothers ask. You shall come with us to our villages, and rest awhile. Our squaws will repair your moccasins. You shall grow fat and strong, for it is easy to see that you have traveled hard and gone hungry. Afterward, if you still

ask it, Chatanskah and his young men will take you west to our brothers of the Teton Council Fire, and they shall guide you to the foot of the Sky Mountains.

"And now let Tawannears sleep in peace. Chatanskah will watch."

But hours later I was aroused by a cold wide that blew from the north, and I sat up to find Tawannears sitting with his chin on his knees, his arms wrapped around his ankles, his eyes on the star-flecked western sky. On his face was that terrible expression of exaltation which I had seen there many times before, a look of brooding anticipation, of fearful expectancy, as of one who hopes to see, but dreads the test.

It was an eery moment betwixt the night and the dawn. The wind clashed overhead, and the stars seemed to stoop earthward. There was a feeling of unheard voices chanting behind the sky. I remembered the agony I had known, that I was now fleeing from. And without cause or reason I felt my heart leap in my breast, and the wells of sorrow seemed to empty and dry up. But a voice whispered out of nowhere:

"*Alone! Alone! Alone!*"

Yet I was not dismayed. I was alone, yes. But memories flocked forward to draw the sting from the word.

Memory! That was the key to it, I saw. Out of memory a man might whittle a new life, a club to shatter loneliness.

I probed the dark corners of my mind to test the theory, dragged forward thoughts and recollections which once must have set all my nerves ajangling. And now they fell into orderly sequence, suffered themselves to be arrayed and rearrayed, tabulated and put back whence they had come. From some of them I had pleasure. From some a stab of pain. But I was always their master. My grief was cured. My mind was again my own.

I spoke softly to Tawannears.

"My brother has not slept?"

He turned sad eyes upon me.

"No, Tawannears thinks of the past—and the hopelessness of the future. But what is this?" He bent toward me. "Otetiani's eyes are clear. The Evil Spirit no longer clouds his face."

"I have found peace, brother," I said simply.

A sudden flame of inner light burned the dejection from his face.

"Otetiani has saved Tawannears from himself. Hawenneyu has spoken. Hanegoategoh has lost his grip. The future is hope, brother."

He lay down where he was and was instantly asleep.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FIGHT FOR THE HERD

CHATANSKAH'S village was a group of buffalo-hide teepees on the bank of a creek flowing into the Missouri, constituting with several similar communities the Wahpeton Council Fire. This was one of the seven divisions, or sub-tribes, of the Dakota, who held the north bank of the Missouri as far as the foothills of the Sky Mountains, and whose political organization, in some ways, reminded me of the great Iroquois Confederacy, an opinion which Tawannears also entertained.

There was about these sons of the open savannahs the same sturdy self-reliance and classic dignity which marked the People of the Long House, dwelling beneath the shadow of the primeval forest which covered most of the Wilderness country east of the Mississippi. They were all big men, lithely-muscled, handsome, with clean-cut, intelligent features, fearless warriors, clever hunters, splendid orators. Like the Iroquois, too, they had conceived the advantages of union, and were consequently feared by all the neighboring tribes.

We had dwelt with them upwards of a week, resting from the fatigue of our recent adventures, when a party of young men came in with news of the approach of a gigantic herd of buffalo from the north. The end of Summer was at hand, and the herds ranging north were beginning to turn back for the southward migration to the Spanish countries, an event of the utmost importance for the Dakota, for whom the buffalo furnished the staples of existence.

They fed largely upon its flesh. They clad themselves in its fur. They wove rope from its hair. Its dung they used for fuel in a country nearly destitute of wood. From its sinews they devised bow-strings. Its horns were employed for weapons or to strengthen their bows or for containers.

For them the buffalo represented the difference between hunger and repletion, between cold and warmth, between nakedness and protection—as it did for all the

surrounding tribes, for hundreds of thousands of wild, free-roving people, inhabiting a country equal to the area of western Europe. And the buffalo was most valuable in the late Summer or Fall, after it had fattened for months upon the juicy grasses of the boundless savannahs, and its fur was grown long and silky in preparation for the Winter.

There was a flurry of preparation amongst the teepees, and as every man counted, we volunteered to accompany the hunting party, which Chatanskah mustered within the hour. The second day we came upon isolated bunches of buffalo, but the chief would not permit his warriors to attack them, claiming, with reason, that if the animals continued in their present direction they would pass close by the village, and might be attended to by the home-stayers. The third day we saw several large herds of many thousands each, but the young men who had brought the news of the migration claimed that the main herd was yet ahead of us.

We proved this true the next morning when the prairies showed black under the migratory hordes. North and west they filled the landscape. Eastward they stretched for a bare half-mile, and Chatanskah hastened to lead his hunters across the front of the serried columns, so as to be able to attack the herd in flank and maintain a constant forward pressure. No man would have cared to attempt to stop in front of that animal mass. Their hoofs shook the ground, and a slight haze of dust rose over them.

To gain our flanking position we were compelled to dip into the bed of a small creek shaded by dwarf trees, and we followed this for perhaps a quarter of a mile. Coming out into the open again, an entirely different spectacle presented itself. Bearing down upon the herd from the northeast appeared a second party of warriors fully as numerous as our own. Exclamations broke from the Dakota ranks, and although at that distance the strangers looked to me no different from our allies, none of Chatanskah's men were in doubt as to their identity, and Tawannears answered my question without hesitation.

"Cheyenne, brother. They are the Striped-arrow People, so called from their custom of using turkey feathers on their arrow-shafts."

"Are they friends or enemies?"

He smiled.

"When two tribes have one herd of buffalo, Otetiani, they can not be anything else but enemies."

"Yet surely there are buffalo enough here for all the Indians in the Wilderness!"

"My brother forgets that once the buffalo are attacked they will begin to run, and no man can tell which way they will go."

"Then we must fight the Cheyenne?"

"So it seems, brother," he replied with truly savage indifference.

Chatanskah and his people were equally convinced that there was but one way out of the difficulty, and they advanced upon the opposing party at a run. The Cheyenne, of course, had seen us as soon as we saw them, and they made it their business to meet us half-way. But both bands halted as though by command a long bow-shot apart, and stood, with weapons ready, eying each other provocatively.

A curious scene! Less than a mile away the buffalo poured south like a living river of flesh. There was some tendency on the part of the outer files to edge away from us, but the bulk of the vast herd paid us no attention whatsoever. They were terrifying in their numbers and inexorable progress. There must have been millions of them. And here were we, so relatively few, preparing to dispute with an equally insignificant body the right to slaughter some few units of their multitudes.

The chief of the Cheyenne stood forward, a giant of a man, his arms and chest gashed by the ordeals of the Sun Dance.

"Why do the Dakota interfere with the hunting of the Cheyenne?" he demanded. "Have they painted for war?"

"The Cheyenne know best whether there is war," retorted Chatanskah. "It is they who interfere with the Dakota's hunting."

"There is war only if the Dakota make it," asserted the Cheyenne. "The Cheyenne have pursued these buffalo for a day. Let the Dakota retire to their own country, and await there the coming of the buffalo."

"Since when have the Cheyenne said what the Dakota shall do?" flashed Chatanskah. "My young men have an answer ready for you."

The Cheyenne surveyed our array before replying.

"Nakuiman[1] sees that the Dakota have with them two of the Mazzonka,"[2] he remarked. "One of them is a large man, but very fat. Send him out here and let him show the warriors if he has strength in that big belly. Tell him to lay aside his weapons, all save his knife, and Nakuiman will do the same. If he comes, Nakuiman will tear out the Mazzonka's heart with his fingers and eat it before the Dakota. But the Mazzonka will not come. He is afraid."

Chatanskah somewhat dubiously translated this speech to Corlaer.

"The Bear is a strong warrior," he added. "He has counted more *coups* than any man of his tribe."

"*Ja*," said Corlaer, and laying aside musket, tomahawk, powder-horn and shot-pouch he pulled his leather shirt over his head.

Still Chatanskah hesitated. As it happened the Dakota had never seen the big Dutchman at hands' grips with an enemy, and whilst they had respect for his marksmanship and quiet sagacity they were inclined to make fun of him behind his back because of his excessive corpulence.

"Chatanskah need not be concerned," spoke up Tawannears, smiling. "Our brother Corlaer is the strongest warrior of his people. The Cheyenne will choose a new chief tomorrow—those who escape from the arrows of the Dakota. Tell Nakuiman to lay aside his weapons."

Chatanskah complied none too happily, and a young Cheyenne warrior advanced from the ranks of his band and relieved his chief of bow and arrows and tomahawk.

"Nakuiman waits," proclaimed the Cheyenne chief. "The Mazzonka is not in a hurry to die."

But Corlaer shambled forward as soon as his opponent had given up his weapons. The Dutchman's legs wabbled comically. His huge paunch waggled before him as he walked. Fat lay in rolls and ridges all over his hairy brown torso, and lapped in creases on his flanks. Only those who had seen him in action knew that beneath his layers of blubber were concealed muscles of unhuman strength, and that his placid exterior was a mask for a will that had never yielded to adversity.

The Cheyenne warriors greeted him with guttural laughter, and the Dakota pulled long faces. Nor could I blame them, after contrasting the outward appearance of the two champions. The Cheyenne was the biggest Indian I have ever seen, well over two yards in his moccasins, with the shoulders of an ox, clean-thewed, narrow-flanked, his legs like bronze pillars. He crouched as Corlaer approached and drew his knife, circling on the balls of his feet, the keen blade poised across his stomach in position to strike or ward, as need arose.

Corlaer, on the other hand, had not even drawn his knife, and his hands hung straight beside him. He slouched along with no attempt at a fighting posture, his whole body exposed to the Cheyenne's knife. The Cheyenne warriors passed from laughter to gibes and humorous remarks—which, of course, Corlaer could not understand—and Nakuiman evidently decided that they were right in their judgment, for he commenced a kind of dancing progress around Corlaer, never coming to close quarters, but maintaining a constant menace with his knife.

Peter, affecting his customary manner of stolid indifference, turned clumsily on his flat feet as the Cheyenne circled him, making no effort to stay the quick rushes by which his opponent gradually drew nearer and nearer. This went on for so long that the Dakota around me commenced to fume with rage and humiliation, whilst the Cheyenne were convulsed with mirth. Then Nakuiman evidently decided to end the farce. He bounded at the Dutchman like a ball flung at a wall, and confident as I had been, I experienced a moment of foreboding as that rush came. Compact with concentrated energy, the Cheyenne drove home his thrust so fast that we bystanders could not follow it.

But Peter could. The Dutchman came awake as though by magic. His lolling stupidity vanished. His great body became instinct with the vitality that flowed inexhaustibly from springs that had never been plumbed. The Cheyenne struck. There was a flash of steel. Peter's arms whipped out. Steel flashed again in a wide arc, and the knife soared high in air and fell, point-down in the sod, twenty feet away. Remained, then, two heaving bodies. Peter held his man by one wrist and a forearm. The Cheyenne was struggling with every ounce of strength to break one of these grips so that he might seize his foe by the throat.

[1] The Bear.
[2] Iron-makers, Indian name for white men.

Whilst I watched he stooped his head and fastened his teeth in Peter's shoulder.

The blood spurted from the wound, and a quiver convulsed Peter's mighty frame. But he refused to be diverted from his purpose. Slowly, inexorably, he applied his pressure. And slowly, but inevitably, the Cheyenne's straining sinews yielded to him. Nakuiman's left arm was forced back—and back. Suddenly there was a loud crack. The Indian yelped like an animal in pain. The arm fell limp—and with the swift ferocity of a cat Peter pounced on the man's throat.

The jaws still fastened in the Dutchman's throbbing shoulder yielded to that awful pressure. A single gasping cry reached us. The Cheyenne's head sank back, and by a marvelous coordination of effort, Peter heaved the man's body at arm's-length over his head. A moment he held it there, his eyes on the ranks of Cheyenne warriors who had laughed at him. Then he flung it at them as though it had been a sack of corn.

It twisted through the air, struck the ground and rolled over and over into a huddle of inanimate limbs.

Peter shook himself, turned on his heel and walked slowly back to us.

"*Oof*," he remarked mildly. "Dot made me sweat."

That matter-of-fact action brought the Cheyenne to realization of what had happened. Carried away by the spectacle of their chief's end, they abandoned all thought of moderation and charged us, bow-strings twanging. But the Dakota were not unprepared. Chatanskah had fetched along a dozen of the French firelocks, in the use of which we had instructed his warriors, and we were able to meet the enemy with a devastating discharge which brought them up short. Leaderless and doubly dismayed, they had no fight left in them, and fled across the prairie pursued by the fleetest young men of the band.

NOW WE WERE left with the pleasant task of reaping a full toll of buffalo-meat, and the remaining Dakota, after scalping the dead Cheyenne and congratulating Corlaer, formed in a long line and trotted down toward the flank of the moving herd. The firing of the muskets had disconcerted the outer files of its mass, but these so far seemed to have made no impression upon the inner columns, and the net result of their perturbation was to slow up the herd's pace and start a confusion which was accentuated to a horrible degree as soon as the Dakota came within bow-shot.

Chatanskah afterward assured us that this herd must have wandered far without encountering men because it showed so little evidence of fear at our approach. He was also of the opinion that any herd of such enormous dimensions was more difficult to stampede than a herd of comparatively small size. At any rate, it was several moments after the booming twang of the bow-strings began that the herd showed a tendency to mill and change its direction. And during those few moments the Dakota slew enough meat to last their village through the Winter. Aiming between the ribs of the shaggy beasts, they drove their flat-headed hunting-arrows into the fat carcasses up to the feathers, and it was seldom that two shots were required for one buffalo. Some staggered on a way, but any buffalo that had a Dakota hunting-arrow in its vitals was sure to drop.

They dropped so fast and so easily that I was overcome with a pang of horror. It seemed ghastly, this wholesale slaughter. Bulls, cows, half-grown calves—but especially cows—fell by the score. It was a battue. And yet it made no impression at all upon the myriads of the herd. As far as we could see from horizon to horizon all was buffalo. They surged up over one skyline and dwindled behind another. And the only noises they made were the low rumbling of their countless hoofs and an indescribably plaintive note, part bellow, part moo—before the fright took them.

Our hunters had slain until their arms ached from pulling the taut bows, and whilst the thousands of buffalo adjacent to us had threshed away and striven to gallop either backward or forward or into the heart of the mass, the mass itself had given no indication of realizing that it was being attacked. I remember thinking that if the brutes possessed any reasoning power they would turn upon us in their numbers and trample us in the dust.

Instead, they fled from us. By some obscure process of animal instinct the warning was conveyed at last from the minor hordes we had harried so mercilessly to their farthermost brethren on the unseen western edge of the swarming myriads. One moment they were trending from north to

south like some unsoluble phenomenon of nature, an endless, dusty procession of shaggy brown hides. The next they had showed us their sterns, turned westward, and were galloping away with a deafening roar of hoofs. It was as if the whole world was in motion. The dust clouds became so dense as to hide all movement. We stood now on the verge of the prairie. From our feet a brown desert stretched in the wake of the fugitive herd, a desert of pulverized earth in which there was not a single growing thing.

The roar of hoofs became faint in the distance. The dust-clouds slowly settled. A short while afterward I came and looked in the direction the buffalo had taken, and they were gone. The brown desert filled the skyline. And all about our Indians were busy with skinning-knives, wrapping the choice cuts of meat in the bloody hides; and Chatanskah was dispatching runners to bring out the full strength of the tribe; for we had made such a killing as seldom fell to the lot of an Indian community, and it behooved them to lose nothing of the riches Nature had thrown in their way. Whatever might be the luck of their brothers in the neighboring villages, the Dakota of the Wahpeton Council Fire knew that for this Winter at least they were certain to abide snug and well-fed in their teepees.

Chatanskah talked of our deeds as the band clustered about the camp-fire that night, with sentries thrown out around the area strewn with dead buffalo to guard the spoil against wolf and wild dog and the eagles that swooped from the air.

"There will be much spoken of this in the Winter Count," he announced proudly. "The old men will say we have done well. The other Council Fires will be envious. But remember, brothers, that it was our white brother who slew Nakuiman with his bare hands and turned the hearts of the Cheyenne to water. *Hai*, that was the greatest fight I ever saw! The Cheyenne will go home and creep under their squaws' robes.

"And what shall we say of our white brother who broke Nakuiman in pieces? The Cheyenne was called The Bear. Is not a warrior who slays a bear more than a bear? *Hai*, my warriors, I hear you say yes! So let us give the slayer of The Bear a new name. We will call him Mahtotopah[1]—for he is a bear, himself, he is Two Bears."

"*Hai*, *hai*," applauded the circles of warriors who sat around the fire, first the old men, outside those the youngsters, who had names to win.

"But Chatanskah will not forget that he has promised to guide Tawannears and his white brothers to the country of the Teton Dakota?" reminded Tawannears.

Chatanskah shook his head sorrowfully.

"Chatanskah has not forgotten," he said, "but he hoped that a bird might come and whisper in the ears of his new brothers and tell them to stay with the Dakota. In the Sky Mountains you will find no sweet buffalo meat. There are no teepees to shield you from the wind. Mahtotopah will waste his strength on the rocks. But you are brave men, and I know you will go on until the Great Spirit calls you."

[1] Two Bears.

TO BE CONTINUED

THE STREAK

by Chester L. Saxby

Author of "The Bosun," "Pearls of Great Price," etc.

ANDREWS was a hard man. Even judged by the standards of the hard South Seas he was hard. His hardness had won him an unenviable respect among the trading brethren—a case of diamond cutting diamond. He gloried in it and preached the gospel of Kipling—to let all men count with you, and none too much. Friendship meant nothing but what you could squeeze out of it—carefully, so you didn't wring the bag dry.

His cold-blooded bargaining brought him good measure of substance and spirit; a topsail schooner, a cocoanut island, and a distrust that his two-fisted tactics made mutual. He hated and was hated; he sheared and was rarely shorn; he taught his two boys to fight, and they nearly killed each other; he drove his vessel without fear or favor, and with neither fear nor favor she turned on him one day and broke his bones by one mad flail of her heavy boom.

He lay cursing for three days while the two whelps he had reared glared at each other in a new suspicion born of approaching possession. When he died, there was the devil to pay, with empty pockets in his spiritual trousers. But that would never worry Andrews. John and Frank could dig down out of what he had left them.

He made no will in writing, but circumstances made it for him. The brutish distrust they evenly divided. An hour's animal battle in the presence of a delighted crew proved that neither had a prior right to that. The schooner, however, could not be sawed in two with any good results. The schooner was the prize. The cocoanut island had no value apart from the schooner because it lay far out of the route even of dickering tramps. So they threw Jennie into the scales.

Jennie was the Baptist missionary's daughter in the Gambiers. The dearth of white womanhood in that part of the world made her pretty; better than that, it made her desirable, pretty or not, to lonely voyagers. Separately John and Frank had made boorish love to her. They tossed a coin for her now.

John balanced the piece of silver on his thumb-nail, preparatory to spinning his fate. John was twenty-seven, Frank twenty-five, yet in yielding this honor Frank watched his brother as a hawk for the slightest sign of malfeasance.

"You call," John directed, and wiped the sweat out of his eyes.

Frank sucked at his split lip.

"You throw it high!" he warned, and added: "Not as I care a heap. I could get me a woman in the German settlements."

"She ain't much," came the amazing agreement, "but she can cook. Understand, him that gets the schooner puts in four

times a year for the copra at a fair market price. That's settled, or I'll launch a raft and go get you with a gun."

"Want the schooner, don't you?" Frank retorted, breathing heavily. "If you want the island—and Jen along with it—spit it out with that tooth I busted off."

John regarded the tipping coin, then laughed.

"Think I'd be a —— landlubber scratching ant-bites? Couple o' squalling brats to mind? Call it!"

"Heads! Stand back and let her roll! Pull in your foot!" Frank trembled.

John's face was ashen.

"She strikes where she wants, you hear? Get your head out so I can—tails!" he said in awed whispering.

He was strangely tense for having won. Something like relief passed over Frank's face.

"Well?" he asked sharply. "You wouldn't be a —— landlubber."

John roused himself with a jerk.

"I take the *Streak*," he intoned, his voice hoarse.

Presently, while Frank sank back in the cabin chair and picked at his calloused palm, John said methodically:

"You sail as passenger to pick up the girl. Not a thing to say about the sailing—and you get off at the island, and you stay off."

Frank sneered. "Jen aboard with you, is it? You put me off at the Gambiers, and Jen and me'll fetch the rest of the way ourselves. Lay to that!"

"If she'll have you," John said. "Now we'll be burying the old man."

Primitive—that was it. Andrews had been hard because he wanted to be. These two were hard without any volition in the matter. The South Seas had mothered them; the shrieking winds had nursed. The seas pounded, pounded; the wind murdered.

FOR three months they had no sight of each other. The *Streak* plied high and low, sniffing a trade in shell, poking her jib-boom in at clan gatherings, beating up as far as Java with slabs of guano, carrying sponges with which to buy whisky to tempt lascars to sell pearls, gnashing at a hurricane that bit her heels and swamped her poop rail, knowing all races on her decks, all crimes that the law sanctions, meeting savagery with savagery, lust with lust, pay dirt with faded print cloth, ignorance with buccaneering.

John Andrews was growing into the image and character of his father and, like him, cheating the devil in life at least. With Frank out of the way, he took on a fine front and laughed as he told how he had trimmed his brother. Recklessness gave him a handsome aspect that drew the coy native women of the Ellice Islands and of the Marquesas to rub their toes against their legs and simper at him, and encouraged colonial girls of Brunei to flirt outright.

He laughed and strutted as naturally as he punished his mast-hands. Invited to dinner, he spun yarns with no glimmer of truth in them, and robbed his hosts next morning in the weights. He knew no rule but gain. He prayed to no god but Mammon.

At the Gambier group of islands he never called. When they bore three hundred miles to eastward and the water ran low, he swore Gambier was full of fever and stood on, challenging mutiny. There might have been fever for him there, but it was not water. Yet no one could ever have said that he was lonely.

On the booming trade-wind the *Streak* danced into the lee of the cocoanut island, and her anchor chain roared out. New white sails fluttered down; new gray paint gleamed from stem to gudgeon, with a new band of red that gave her her name. Whistling a tune that the colonials in New Zealand were singing, John dropped into a boat and went ashore. Before him half a dozen ill-clothed natives tumbled out of his path. They were scooping out copra from the shells and hiding it.

Frank came out of a thatched hut and glared at him. John laughed in the manner of a man utterly at ease, while Frank took him in from head to feet—the silk sailing cap, the well-cut suit of drill, the spotless canvas shoes. Frank had allowed himself to run down. He had not yet got his second wind, as it were; the solitariness had not worn off.

"Taking a wink of rest, you were. Sorry to disturb you," said John.

Frank let that go by, although his eyes smoldered. Rest!

"Start loading right away. By the way, you ought to use a razor, Frank. Don't see How Jen stands you. Must be you don't kiss her any more."

A horrible noise rose in Frank's throat. A spasm crossed his face; his right hand jerked something into view. John, watchful, struck it to the ground with the stick he had had the presence of mind to carry.

"She's taking the tuck out of you, Frank. Pulling a gun on me don't show much trust in your fists. Soft life breaking out on you."

Frank came at him ferociously. He dropped the stick, well satisfied, and undertook to settle a question of ten years' standing. They fought for blood; they were of the jungle. John's natty uniform became splotched; the coat, rent and discolored, he tore off his back during a moment in which Frank picked himself up from the ground. In astonishment the brown-skinned "boys" crept close to gloat over this battle of extermination. It lasted an hour, helped out by the booming trade-wind that cooled the sweat on the driving bodies. Then they sagged wearily, cursing each other. John's fury was the greater for his added two years; he had believed he could do it. And now it would take months of waiting.

Sprawling forward, Frank retrieved his gun and lurched up.

"Git!" he barked.

There was a hint of wild joy in his brandishing of the revolver, and he herded John down to the shore with taunting epithets, then stood laughing shrilly as the other was drenched by the surf in pushing off.

"Jen and me didn't ask for callers," he bawled. "Stay aboard your vessel, and don't let me see you put foot on my island! I'd as leave pot you as spit."

John regained his poise and shrugged. One way was as good as another, he argued with himself. Frank must take his price for the copra. He was singing when the first lot was rafted out. Frank counted out the money the mate brought him, thrust his tongue into his cheek, squinted out at the cleanly dressed *Streak*, and said nothing.

But each gained something by the incident. John surmised that he needed hardening, and baited his crew at every opportunity to keep his muscles in trim; also for long minutes at a time he mused of Jennie's non-appearance. Surely such a struggle should have fetched her running if she cared for Frank at all. Why had she not showed herself? Was it pride? Did she feel the humiliation of being stuck away on a god-forsaken rock in the loneliness of the ocean? She was a woman—aye, she was a woman! John's blood quickened; his jaws swelled.

He was finding that he didn't care a snap of his fingers for these others. Frank had done him in, made him choose the schooner in spite of himself. Rage shook him intolerably, distorted his features.

Gradually he cooled down. He would wait—sit tight and wait. What did a few months matter, so they brought her a greater contempt for Frank and her fool compact with him? In three months he would be back again.

AND promptly on the day he tacked into the cove once more. The gulls swept up homelessly about the reef and over the deathly still land. Their skirling made the island a cavern of dreariness. The trade-wind howled eternally and canted the palms dismally toward the north-west as if pointing, pointing, ever pointing to where men and women mingled, chatting, laughing in a joyous company.

John anchored as close in as he dared and started the phonograph that he had acquired for this one purpose. The wind high overhead interfered no whit with the stealing inland of the romping strains of the orchestra—a dance tune such as Jennie could not withstand. Smoking an aristocratic cigar, and wearing a tailor-made suit at which the uncomprehending foremast hands batted their eyes, John strutted the deck, giving a smug glance now and then upward toward the glistening, gilded trucks, at the silk flag flapping, at the bright-hued boats swaying at the davits like dancers drunk with melody. The mate was sent ashore with gold on his cuffs and in his hand a newspaper he was ordered to let drop before the hut for Jennie to find.

John was in no hurry. His shears were not rigged when the lightered copra came out. Moreover, he found fault with the stowing and held up the raft. And always he peered through the palms for a glimpse of a flitting figure, supple and graceful and inwardly surging with denied youth. The third day dragged on.

But Jen did not show herself, and the mate had not seen her. John became grim. She might be sick—or dead! The three months following his admission of his ache for her had been torture. He imagined every sort of thing.

At length he went ashore. He went no farther than the gray-white sands. A bullet sang past his head, and he stood stock still.

Frank stepped from behind a tree. His trousers were rags; the coat he wore was of recognizable white drill, rent and splattered in a mauling struggle.

Evenly John spoke:

"Wouldn't be anybody sick here? Needing a doctor?"

"No," said Frank.

There were hollows in his cheeks and a high color. His eyes burned above dark rims.

"No, there's nobody sick." Then he burst into a full laugh.

"You'd maybe be the doctor."

He laughed and laughed; he had marked the ruse. And all the while John strove to think of a way.

"Her father's dying," he stated dully. "Who's there to tend to him?"

Frank stopped laughing.

"You been to the Gambiers?" It was almost like a squeal, and the gun came up waving.

"You liar, you been to the Gambiers?"

"Where would I hear it, if I didn't put in there?" John answered.

"And she wasn't——"

Frank floundered and began again: "She wasn't asked for, was she? He didn't give you to understand— A dirty trick, John Andrews!"

He ran forward vaguely and shook his fist.

"By ——, you're cheap—cheap!" The tears were coursing down his face. "I give you three to climb aboard! One——"

Stunned, wondering, John obeyed. Slamming the door of his cabin after him, he slumped down. Jen was dead—dead! The prisoning had killed her; that was why Frank acted that way. Or else— A nasty expression grew, his veins stood out, he choked. If he couldn't lick Frank, what chance had she when the madness of the gulls and the endless humming of the wind got into Frank's head? Even crying out, she wouldn't .be heard, and the natives were plain fools.

He slouched down. Too late now, too late! Was it yesterday or a month ago? How far away was he? Did she call his name? He could have saved her if, when he won the toss, he had chosen her as he had intended before Frank bluffed him out. He could have saved her! Anguish for a mistake laid hold on him for the first time in his life. He groaned and sagged down.

In time the dry creaking of the shears ceased, and the hatch-covers were thumped into place. In gathering dusk the mate stamped in to report. Mute, indifferent, John flung him his wallet. The mate marched out.

Suddenly the dank, black purposefulness of his father boiled up in the son. His mind grew clear and deadly cold. He sat up, got to his feet, went on to the deck. He bawled for the anchor.

"Jib-halyards! Look alive! With a will, there!"

"Charley," he growled into the mate's ear, "stand out till it's dark, and when I give you the word, come about and heave to about two miles off the island and drop the gig. I go on to it alone. Douse all lights. Pick me up in the morning."

The mate's mouth slowly twisted up. His huge, bland face was knowing.

"Sure. Watch out the niggers don't see yuh. Mean beggars, them!"

John went back into the cabin and found the thing he wanted; a machete used for cutting sugar-cane. A Javanese now dead had tried clumsily to give it to him for nothing. He stuck it into his shirt. The tropic twilight fell all at once.

Around came the *Streak*. Charley tapped him on the shoulder presently. He swung down into the gig and unshipped the oars. His brain thrummed with the dance music of the phonograph to which Jen, magic, intense, wonderful, seemed to sway and lean against him. She was happiness incarnate; she was desire brimming over. All the glory of her that he had not realized before flamed hot in his mind. He had wanted her past his knowing—and he had given her up to Frank—and Frank had murdered her!

The wind sobbed softly, dying out. In the last half-mile it was gone, cut off as by a screen. The air was sultry and not easy to breathe. When he thought of it, he scented trouble a-sea; but that was another thing.

The gig struck into a mangrove thicket. He didn't care. He left it there and clambered and tripped and swashed over and among the leg-like roots to firm ground. He avoided the shelters of the natives and approached the hut. Through the paneless window he peered at Frank sitting on a stool beside a lighted candle, writing on a pad.

The gun was not in sight; probably hidden from the natives.

As John reached the door, a peculiar, oppressive breath of wind swirled by, puffed at the candle-flame and fled on. It blew from the west; the wind had hauled. A bad night. His face worked. Aye, a bad night!

When Frank at last looked up and saw John six feet away from him, no fear appeared in his eyes. But he thrust the writing pad into a rude box.

"You won't shoot me now," John spoke up. "What did you do with her?"

Frank looked at him for a long interval.

"Oh," he said. "That's why you're back. None of your business." And a pitiful pride jerked his head.

"No," John rejoined deliberately, running hot and cold, "I got the schooner. Well, I was afraid you'd swallow the gun before I got to you. I'm glad of that. It wouldn't be right. A gun's easy."

Frank nodded.

"Yes, a gun's easy. I'd maybe be forced to eat it myself, but I'd never use it on you."

Out of the shelf he drew a flask of whisky and took a long drink. He stood up, sobbed a swift imprecation, and hurled the flask. It struck John's upswung arm.

"You thief, you stole her! You stole her!"

No reply came from John. Warily he advanced, bare-handed, sure of his strength this time. The hot breath rushed past again. The candle-flame guttered. Two bodies met, swerved apart, and met again. The sound of the next gust began at a great distance and advanced like the noise of a million teeth gnashing. The air of the room was sucked out, drawing the flame out with it on ghostly fingers. A hurricane! But the two in the hut had no ears for it. They gasped. By the starlight they attacked, and, when that was snuffed, by the instinct of hatred.

The instinct of hatred grown up, heaping layer on layer the toll of the building years, minor happenings, fancied affronts, the insult of brotherhood itself, suspicion, suspicion, suspicion! Jacob and Esau! The very sight of each other had the power to do this, to send all reason screaming off like flapping crows from a banging shotgun. They hated because they hated, because old Andrews had hated, because the savage world of the South Seas hated—and they had known no other.

The instinct grown up was more terrible in that it sought something on which to feed. The youthful flame was not enough, but old Andrews had done his part nobly; he had left them a topsail schooner and a remote cocoanut island. He must surely be laughing now, thoroughly enjoying himself. He had even fetched Jennie out of the unknown and, in a manner, thrown her at them by confining them aboard the lonely vessel when their young animal blood fiercely demanded a broader pasture. He had sowed well. How he would relish this reaping!

It was a gaunt thing, this fight in the bludgeoning night. The darkness made it desperate; the storm made it primordial. As long as the stars pricked out the square of the window, each circled to place his enemy in the tell-tale frame to make his jealous lunges count. There was no foolish wasting of strength; rather, a shrewd hoarding toward a final moment. A useless trick! Two minds nursing the same thought, two hearts refusing the impulse to batter and crush, two hungry souls defending a wretched birthright! Two tonight! One tomorrow!

A head went back, jolted almost to the snapping. A groan—and its fellow—for one was pain and the other was disappointment that the reeling body still stood upright. But night that brings out the stars, blotted them in an immense black sponge, and the window was smudged and rubbed out. Only the sickening pinpoints of light bursting behind the eyes when a fist landed; only this and the hope of the ultimate moment were left. Through the doorway the clotting air flowed as thickly as a rushing river, flowed in and roared and rocked the hut and flowed out again. A continuous ripping as of inch-thick cloth or gigantic fibers mingled in the roar and the flowing. Cocoanuts bombarded the roof; a fallen tree blocked the door, demolishing the rude sash. And still the storm increased without and within.

John had found Frank now and driven him into a corner. This was the end! He was near to crying with the joy of his revenge achieved. Jen! Jen! It was poor justice to the sacrificed, and yet this soul burning in hell was payment, payment in kind and the score evened. He warded off Frank's lashing attempt. He set his feet and struck. The three months had taught him where the life ran closest to the surface. One! That would fetch the arms

down low. Two! The feint had worked, had felt out the outline as clearly as if the room were bathed in sunlight. Oh, how good his strength tasted now! He knew he was babbling. What did it matter? Three! Ah, he had heard it! No questioning the sound! He had won—won! In the corner a dead weight slipped down. He listened. There was nothing.

He turned away into the threshing wind stinging with rain-drops and tried to find the door. He stumbled over wreckage, brought up against a barrier, groped, fell and lay panting. There was torture in his arm; he supposed his hand was broken, but it would mend, and the storm would pass. *Crash!* The roof! Chaos! Flying particles hurtled at him. He huddled down to wait, grew sick, went numb, fainted. When he came to himself, the stars were shining.

The quiet of the tomb! He swam in it, although the wind was gone and the air still. A horrifying sensation stole up from a thousand miles beneath him, just because a stray ripple of sound lived and stirred in this immensity. He swam faster and faster to escape it. It came again. He cried out and sank.

"John!" The strangeness was lifting.

This was real, as the stars were real and the wet floor and the shooting pain in his hand.

"Did she send you?"

He had the courage to feel for his knife, to balance it in his left hand and to throw it, whistling, at the voice. On his elbow he waited. Came the flash and roar of a gun—twice—three times.

"I'm not shooting you, John," said the voice. "And I don't know where the knife went."

Something clattered and bounced to the floor. "That's the last bullet. I wouldn't kill you because you're all I've got. It's been —— lonesome."

"Well, then, you're alive," John was able to reply. "That's funny."

"The thatch sagged in front of my face, or my neck would be broke. If it was light, I'd have stopped you, John." A pause. "Did she send you?"

John was afraid then. The fear made him stutter, "N-no."

"Did you see her? How did she look? What did she say?"

"No." It was little more than a whisper. "I didn't see her. How would I see her? How would anybody see her? She's dead," John blustered. "You killed her."

Silence. Then Frank laughed and laughed—unpleasantly. And he snapped out more and more savagely:

"Kill her? Why would I kill her? Just the boys—and mad for somebody to talk to—mad enough to talk to you and like it, you fool!"

Slowly John asked—

"What did you do with her then?"

"Do with her? I left her alone; that's what I did to her! I didn't go near her! I came by myself! Think I'd ask her to bury herself in this rotten place? She's too good for it! She's—she's——"

There his voice died away.

THE morning dawned, thrusting up out of the dark. John released himself painfully from the tangle of wreckage and dragged out over the bole of the stricken palm. Frank was standing in something like a trance, his face smeared with blood, his eyes puffy, staring all about. Hardly a tree broke the long vista of foamy combers charging in. In lines, in ragged rows, with broken roots upturned, the cocoanut palms lay prone. The dismal wail of the native workers Frank ignored utterly.

John hurried to the shingle, mindful of the schooner. A sudden panic took him so that he ran like one possessed, with no thought for his throbbing hand. He ran and ran, stopping now and again to gaze out to sea, gnawing at his lip and mouthing incoherent syllables. He was expecting a miracle; in part he witnessed it. The *Streak* was piled up on the coral reef when she might have foundered in five hundred fathoms with all hands. Not that he cared about Charley and the rest, except that if there was a chance, every man helped. It looked like a poor chance.

He heard Frank behind him. Suspicious at once that Frank would see the gig, apparently uninjured in the mangrove thicket, he started back from the shore. Frank smiled to himself, with a wistful look in his emaciated face.

"I should have saved the bullets and let you have the gun so you wouldn't be scared of me," he said. He appeared not to notice John's ugly look. "I was wondering," he went on as if to himself, "what mother was like. Kind of interesting."

John growled an oath.

"Lot your island's worth now, anyway."

He surmised that Frank was laughing up his sleeve at the plight of the *Streak*.

But Frank merely nodded.

"She might have been like—like Jen."

John's fists doubled, but he stalked on. They strode toward the hut. Out of what he could find Frank produced a cold breakfast.

They ate at some distance from each other, yet a certain difference was discernible between them, a difference difficult to determine. Somehow Frank accepted it all more quietly.

"I can help you, and we'll plank her up so she's seaworthy."

John's answer was gruff.

"There's Charley and four hands. They'll do."

"Well, I've got some money. I can pay my passage." He met John's hard glare. "I'm not butting in on Jen. What would I be able to give her?"

He got up and walked away. John later found him knee-deep in a hole out of which a palm had torn. One would have said he was examining the roots.

At the last, standing beside the gig, facing dour John, he acted unnaturally.

"I won't fight you for it, John, because it's your boat. But I can't stay on alone. Here's two hundred dollars."

He extended the money, very grim.

The face and form of Jennie hovered between them, plain to behold; the gay, absence-beautified face, the distractingly supple figure. The island was a desolate rock; the schooner might be a total wreck. Jen alone—only Jen!

"You're afraid of me," said Frank. "You're afraid to take me. Here's your knife; the point's gone, where it hit the gun in my pocket."

He tossed it on to a thwart. Down beside it went the gun, likewise.

"Some leads to use in it."

The box rattled into the gig.

"You've got three hundred dollars you held out on me for the copra. Anything else?"

In a temper John ordered:

"Don't be standing there! Shove off! Get in!"

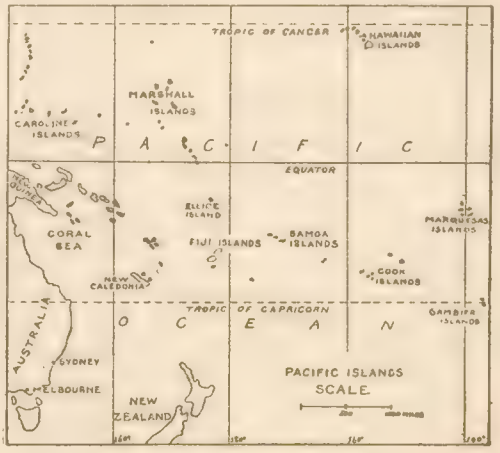
Charley met them at the *Streak's* port rail. He stared in surprize at Frank. The crew could be heard hammering in the hold.

"All hands safe. We'll manage," Charley reported out of his South Seas inconsequence. "Reckon we can pump and pound and maybe make the Gambiers."

John started. The Gambiers were closest, of course.

He looked dejectedly fore and aft, alow and aloft. Aye, the bright-painted boats were gone, the silk flag, the gilded trucks, the new canvas. Tatters and frayed bights hung like Spanish moss.

But they sealed her passably—planking, tar and oakum. She was a sight with her patched, crazy sails. Old Andrews would



have raved. And they got her off at last, with minor injuries to the crew—just when her butts were starting again. Thanks to her small tonnage, she floated. The trade-winds blew her out, all hands fell to pumping, held there and lashed at and driven by the bucko Andrews spirit.

Precious little distance the dilapidated schooner measured off in a day. The strain told in faces and arms; men reeled away to tumble in, dead for four hours. John slept behind a locked door, as a penalty for his hard methods. But that didn't keep the four hands from stealing the gig and chancing it on their own when they had gone sick with the pumping. They disappeared in the night, and Charley, who was supposed to be in charge of the deck, woke up and found out first. He had no compunction about taking the life buoy. The *Streak* was sinking, anyway.

She was awash when Frank stumbled up—awash and silent. He grabbed an ax and chopped in the door of John's berth. John lay drunk with whisky he had denied the crew, and Frank had to drag him out. He

stopped long enough to pry loose the hatch cover, then leaped from the rail with John unconscious in his arms. It was a wise act, inasmuch as the schooner sank immediately afterward, and he was able to swim out far enough to avoid the suction of her foundering. John was a devilish load to get to the bobbing hatch cover. He sat propped up, in water to his waist. The fumes scattered.

"She's gone." Frank lifted a dripping arm and waved it. "First the cocoanut grove and now the schooner. That don't leave us much. We start even."

"End even," John corrected him, profoundly disgusted. "What's the idea bringing me off here? I'm cold. Die of thirst in two days. Rubbing it in!"

"I couldn't stand it to be alone," Frank admitted. "I've been alone. I know. 'D rather drown. Somebody to talk to means a lot. Don't hold it against me. If we're not sighted, we can drop off any time."

John gloomed at his brother, trying to make him out. Frank talked on, striving to exonerate his rash deed.

"Only reason I put the gun on you those times. Knew you'd hoist anchor and clear if I didn't do something. Thought you'd sneak back the first trip, but you didn't."

He looked over the water sadly. A round sea attempted to bowl him over.

"The night you came into the hut—" he laughed over the confession sheepishly—I was tickled to see you! Hoped I could lay you out so you'd have to stay on. Too dark, that was all. Sorry to impose on you now, but I wasn't going through hell again. Put on this coat, it's yours."

They couldn't lie down. They stood up and worked their arms and rubbed their legs, and sat down in the water. Twice the sun dropped into the sea and was extinguished; twice they saw it rise, while their eyes grew filmed and their minds wandered somewhat. Frank, crazy to talk in spite of his swollen lips, spoke of his mother a second time. It seemed to bother him to picture how she had looked. He got her utterly confused with Jennie, but John paid no heed. He had given up hope.

On the third day a vessel hove in sight and lowered a boat. It came upon two men squatting on their knees, half-submerged, and singing a bald Limehouse ballad with odd bits of Mother Goose thrown in. Their arms were draped about each other's necks as they rolled to left and right, keeping time, grinning hugely.

"Balmy," the officer muttered. "Haul 'em in quick! One at a time!"

"You'll take him first," spoke up John, with a leer like a Cheshire cat. They barely made out his words. "We're not so —— anxious. Fine time."

They had good constitutions, for they were old Andrews' sons. A little broth, a good sleep after a hot sweat; in addition, the captain's statement that the brig was standing in for water to the Gambiers—it fetched them on to wobbly legs.

They faced a bad situation. The cocoanut grove was gone; the topsail schooner had foundered; of the inheritance only the dank hatred and distrust remained. And they were coming up to where Jen lived and laughed and—loved.

No tact or diplomacy had been born with either one. On the wings of want the question burst out violently. The days on the hatch-cover fled out of memory, it seemed. Defensive animals they were—old Andrews' own brand.

"The contract don't hold any more," John declared hotly. "It's the best man now. I'm two years older. You keep out of my way!"

"You're two years older, but you're not the best man," countered Frank.

There was blood in him. If his strength was lacking, so was John's.

"I speak first. I've got insurance money coming. You can't keep her."

"There's one way to settle it," Frank shot back, scowling.

But they might have known it was no way. They landed and plunged into the thicket and stripped off their shirts. It was a puny fight full of show and spent of force. They clinched often and rolled to the ground out of harm's way. A cat fight it was, without the squalling. Fists went wild or landed ineffectually.

Unutterably chagrined, dumb with shame, they felt about for their discarded shirts. Each relied upon reaching Jennie ahead of the other. John skulked off by a little-known path. Frank dashed straight into the thicket.

JENNIE sat on her father's doorstep, humming idly, plaiting oleanders in her dark hair. A vessel was in, and sailors. She had glimpsed a strapping mate in shore clothes. Presently

she would wander down to show herself.

John came stumbling up. He halted and wiped the sweat out of his eyes. His hair clung matted to his forehead; his face was dirty and savage like his clothes.

She showed scant pleasure at sight of him. He darted a look over his shoulder, got a grip on himself. It was more than he had bargained for.

"How are you, Jen? My brother Frank—you know him, Jen."

It was precipitate, illogical chatter.

"He says you'd fall for him. Says you'd marry him quick, and save being an old maid. Well, I see him with a Feejee girl—he'd tell you different. He won't do for a clean, Christian woman. I'm telling you, Jen, because, I think a lot of you and I don't want you to go wrong on him."

Tearing wildly at the underbrush, Frank advanced drunkenly. He heard the last words and paused to weigh them craftily. But he came up swaggering.

"Howdy, Jen? Maybe I'm butting in."

He gaged her critically from every angle. His manner grew easy.

"Not just presentable, I guess. Lost the *Streak* at sea, we did. Not a length of rope salvaged. Cheerful, eh?"

He scratched his weedy, frowsy head. The sea had burst open his shoes. His feet were dirty.

"Your pa'll help us out a mite, won't he? John's got to have his whisky. Old times' sake and all. We've struck hard luck. What do you say?"

He leaned down suddenly and whispered in her ear so that she looked up quickly at John.

"What's he saying?" John demanded. "It's a lie!"

"You're a good girl," Frank mumbled with apparent irrelevance.

She tossed back her hair. For no reason at all she laughed. Her shoulders rose in a peculiar motion.

"I remember now," she said lightly. "You're Barking Andrews' boys." She laughed again, nervously. "You'll have to excuse me. I'll call father."

She rose and went into the house. She stayed there.

John frowned. "——!" he said. "That's Jen, is it?"

"She didn't use to have as long a nose as that," Frank ventured tentatively. "Don't see that she fell for you, John. She'd be your style, too."

"You didn't do so much yourself," John growled.

They moved off down to the beach and sat on an overturned boat. They gazed out to sea. Darkly subdued they were for many minutes. Frank sighed. John sent a stone skimming.

"What was that lie about the whisky for?"

The clouds slowly left Frank's tragic eyes.

"When did you ever see me with a Feejee girl?"

Silently they continued to gaze out to sea.

John kicked at the sand.

"The schooner was the only friend I had. I kind of thought Jen was."

He swung about, as if something bothered him past enduring.

"—— if I cared so much about marrying her. But I won't have you get her!"

"Same here—and you needn't holler at me!" They glared. "It's lonesome enough, and nobody wanting to have anything to do with you. The missionary was standing right in the door. I saw him."

"Sure. It's always that way." A quiver ruffled John's cheek. "Well, I can buy me another schooner and make 'em eat dirt."

"Dirt!" repeated Frank. His eyes lighted. "I know where there's some dirt that would come high. My cocoanut island's full of it. Guano."

"That so? How do you know?" John dug hard at the sand.

"Saw it where the palms pulled out. The island's made of it. A mint o' money in it. I could maybe charter a vessel——"

"Don't know but what I could make you as good a price as any," John grumbled. "Go trusting everybody, and they'll cheat you out of the stuff."

Frank nodded. "Work it on shares; so much for cutting and loading."

"Split it even if you want," John suggested. "You own half the schooner, and I own half the island, so nobody can tell the other what to do."

Frank slapped his leg.

"It's a bargain! We shake on that!"

John stopped digging with his toe. Roughly he put out his right hand, aimlessly grasped Frank's—and held on. Neither knew why. It was the hand that had nearly broken Frank's neck, and the pressure on the torn ligaments was cruel. That accounts for the half-formed tears in John's eyes, but not for those in Frank's.

Old Andrews would have wondered what

to make of that handshake. He hadn't had anything to do with it. In fact, nothing was left that he had had anything to do with. The inheritance was spent—riotously.

"I've got money to take us to Wellington," Frank stated.

"I'll borrow passage money," John murmured abstractedly.

"You've got a nerve," and Frank meant it. He disliked having a gift refused. "You're pig-headed about taking favors. Better get over it."

"Is that so?" John flared up. "You don't any more than lend it to me, or, bust my toplights, when I get my strength back I'll —oh, all right."

THE LAST OF THE OPEN RANGES

By Frederick R. Bechdolt

Author of "Adobe Walls," "The First Cowboy," etc.

IN THE fine big years before sheep and barbed-wire fences began to desecrate Wyoming's open ranges there was a cowboy by the name of Mike Burnet in the Wind River country, and he went wrong. The old-timers who tell the story say that he was a likable young fellow and honest at the bottom; but cowtown whisky and the hard-eyed women of the dance halls got the best of him. So he drifted into the company of those riders who "threw a long rope" as the saying goes, and time finds him with another rustler who called himself Spencer driving a band of stolen horses into the Territory from Montana.

Southward they came to Wind River and took the Sheridan trail which still spans Wyoming, linking the Black Hills to eastern Idaho. In an old atlas, whose maps of Western States are not all cut up with county lines and railroads, it will be easy to find Union Pass, where they crossed the Continental Divide and descended to the Gros Ventre River. For Winter was approaching, and they had decided to hold up the herd in Jackson's Hole until next Spring.

They were not the first horse-thieves who had arrived at that decision. Long before their time Jackson's Hole had gained an ill name among the stockmen of five Commonwealths. The valley lies hidden deep between glacier-scarred peaks; the steep-walled Tetons guard it on the west, and in the east the snow-clad summits of the Wind River and Shoshone ranges part the waters of the continent.

From the northern end where the Snake River rises to the narrow gap where it breaks its way through lofty cliffs in the south is sixty miles. The greatest width is twenty miles.

"The Last of the Open Ranges," copyright, 1922, by F. R. Bechdolt.

There are three entrances—by Teton Pass from Idaho, and from the Wyoming side by Union and Two Ocean Passes. The traveler who comes by any one of them is visible for miles; nor can he reach the floor without passing through rocky ravines which one man could hold against a hundred.

So in years gone by other armed riders had sought refuge from pursuit here and fattened their stolen horses on the grassy flats until the hue and cry blew over. The settlers of those earlier days had made an art of minding their own business—and a profitable art at that, for a man who is hard-pressed is not likely to haggle over prices of pasturage where he gets the privileges of sanctuary thrown in with the feed.

The remnants of the old rustlers' corrals are still to be seen near the spot where "Teton" Jackson's cabin used to stand; and there are men in the Hole who will tell you how Jim Thompson ambushed a posse in a cañon near the foot of Teton Pass. He had removed the bead of his Winchester that day to readjust his sights, but he managed to do such good shooting without it that he sent the invaders back across the mountains.

However, those times were past when Mike Burnet and Spencer made their camp and turned out the stolen herd to graze along Flat Creek, not many miles from where the town of Kelly stands today. A new group of settlers was occupying Jackson's Hole. They were hard-working men who did a little ranching and trapped between times; they had no dealings with the rustlers. Pierce Cunningham was one of them; his place was farther up the valley, a cabin, stable and some excellent hay-land. When the first snow began flying and all signs presaged a hard Winter, the two visitors sought him out.

While horses could ordinarily rustle feed enough on Slate Creek to carry them through, it was apparent that the hardiest bronco would have a difficult time to weather the storms among this season's drifts. The rustlers were going to lose the entire band unless they moved them right away.

They offered Cunningham a good price for his hay. He did not know the animals; the Montana brands were strange to him; the possessors told a plausible story of purchase. If he cherished any suspicions he put them by and yielded to their pleadings.

Now Mike Burnet and Spencer settled down in the rancher's cabin to wait for the coming of Spring; and some time later Pierce Cunningham departed to the lower end of the valley where he had a chance to earn a little money. The snow came deep. He saw no more of the two horse-thieves. Jackson's Hole was cut off from the world.

The months went by. The drifts were growing harder in the passes; the days were getting longer, and warm breezes were beginning to blow when the settlers down at the southern end of Jackson's Hole found their life's routine interrupted by the arrival of four travelers who had crossed the Teton Pass from Idaho.

They were a hard-bitten quartet, and they came fully armed. Any one with half an eye could see that they were here on urgent business. Men did not journey over the Tetons at that time of the year for pleasure. When they had looked about they made it known that they were deputy sheriffs from Montana on the trail of a band of stolen horses.

Now in the old days it is altogether probable that they would never have got that far with their project; and if they had, they would have met with neither encouragement nor information. But times had changed; the settlers of Jackson's Hole were law-abiding men. And so, to make a long story short, Pierce Cunningham, Robert Miller and Frank Peterson joined forces with the posse.

They made the journey to Cunningham's ranch on snowshoes. Early one morning they came in on the little clearing. One hundred yards or so from the cabin there was a barn. Two of the Montanans slipped up to the building and entered it while the rest of the party lay behind the crest of a low ridge which commanded the whole place.

IT WAS just about sunrise when the door of the cabin opened and Spencer appeared with his forty-five slung at his side. The men behind the ridge lay motionless; those in the barn made no sound as he walked briskly down the trail.

But when he reached the corral something or other roused his suspicions. He halted within the pole enclosure and looked about him. It is possible that his eye had caught a hole which those within had knocked

through the stable's chinking. At any rate his hand dropped toward his revolver.

Then one of the pair in the barn called out, "Hands up;" and Spencer pulled his gun. He never fired. A bullet caught him fairly between the eyes, and he fell upon his face in the corral.

The sound of the shot brought Mike Burnet from the room where he was busy making breakfast. The cabin was designed after the Rocky Mountain fashion—two small log buildings with a ten-foot interval between them, spanned by the roof. He made his stand in the shelter of this areaway.

The rifles rattled behind the ridge, and his Winchester answered at intervals. Now and then a slug buried itself in the logs close by; but none found him. Strategically he held the big advantage; but when some one shouted to him to throw up his hands and come forth, a prisoner, he did a strange thing. Men who knew him say that he had gone desperate from dissipation before he ever took to rustling horses and that he did not care whether he lived or died. So now he leaped into the open:

"I'll never give myself up," he cried. "You'll have to get me like you did Spencer."

The besiegers answered his defiance with a volley; but before they slew him he managed to kill one of the Montanans who had raised his head above the summit of the ridge to get a better shot at him.

In this manner Mike Burnet died; and the men from Montana drove the stolen horses away from Jackson's Hole. The settlers saw them depart over Teton Pass and went on about their business. None of them had relished the shooting, but they felt that they had done their duty as honest citizens.

Spring-time passed and Summer came. One day the truth drifted into the valley. They learned that those whom they had helped on that tragic morning were not officers. Nor were they the owners of the stolen horses. In brief they were horse-thieves themselves.

That is the way the old-timers tell the story. It is given here with its sardonic ending to illustrate the condition in which the settlers found themselves throughout Wyoming and the adjacent territories. It was an era when the small man did well to attend to his own business. And as a rule he adoped that course of action.

IN THOSE days the large outfits lay in the plains and lower foothills country. Their ranges reached into the mountains. Here, where water was plentiful and feed grew belly-high, homesteaders were appearing. They built their cabins and they fenced their claims.

And every strand of barbed wire did just so much more toward hampering the movements of the range cattle. They had to travel farther to water, and in the Winter they could no longer drift at will before the storms. That condition in itself begat friction; and from the beginning the nester and the stockman disliked each other cordially.

The cattle-rustlers and the horse-thieves made most of their forays on the herds of the big outfits. It was natural enough that the settlers should not be greatly concerned over the increase of this stealing. A man who lived alone some fifty miles from his nearest neighbor was not likely to go out of his way to carry information concerning a well-armed outfit who rode by his place with a drove of horses—even if he recognized the brands—when he knew that the ponies belonged to those who were trying to crowd him out of the country; and he became less investigative when he realized that the thieves or their friends would be sure to ride by his place again.

Precisely the same indifference existed when it came to cattle. If you happened to run across some hard-eyed citizen in the act of changing an H brand into a window-sash, you were going to look the other way and ride right on if you were blessed with an ordinary sense of self-preservation; and if the big cowman, in whose name the H was registered, got your good wishes—why, that was all he did get.

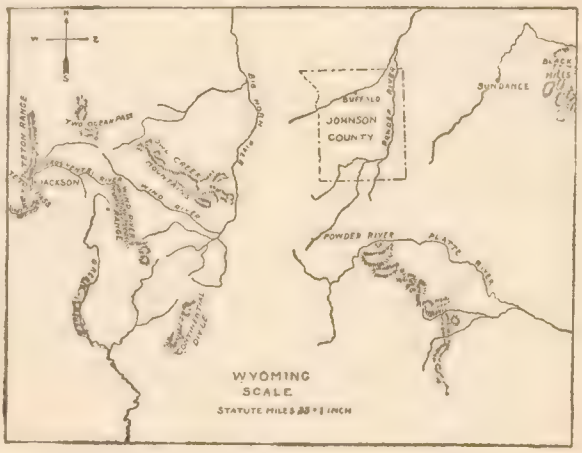
That was the state of mind of the honest settlers, who were increasing in numbers in Wyoming, from 1885 until the whole bad business ended. They were neutrals—but like most neutrals they had their sympathies. There were also some men who passed as honest, but were not above making a dollar when all they had to do was to keep their eyes shut.

This attitude on the part of the settlers made it possible for horse-stealing and stock-rustling to grow to the large proportions which they attained in the latter eighties and early nineties. It has been dwelt upon at some length in order to give an idea why the things took place which

are to be described. Otherwise the narrative might seem incredible.

Of these two illicit industries the former held the greater appeal to bold spirits. The days when a bunch of men could swoop down on a herd of cattle and drive away two hundred at a single raid had vanished with the passing of the Southwestern outlaws. The country was getting too civilized for that sort of thing when the Northern ranges became well stocked.

Rustling cows meant brand-altering and was a comparatively slow process. But horses moved swiftly, and it was still possible to take them from their owners in big bands; to drive them fast and far until one found some hiding-place where he could rest them. So, of the lawless element who were drifting into Wyoming during the early eighties, the abler and more daring members identified themselves with the horse-thief gangs.



Their operations extended over a period of about twelve years. Toward the last there came into existence a sort of hidden organization whose influence reached throughout Wyoming, Utah, Idaho, Montana and Colorado. There was for a time an underground railway by which the stolen animals were shifted from State to State. In after years men called it the old outlaw trail. Really it was no trail at all but consisted of a dozen different rendezvous like Jackson's Hole, in any one of which a man acquainted with the combination could hide out and hold up his herd so long as he deemed it advisable.

These places did not all appear at once, but grew into being one by one through the necessities of local gangs. All of them had certain common characteristics. One of these was the strategic advantage which each gave its occupants over pursuers. The approaching rider was always visible for miles and sooner or later was sure to find himself at the mercy of the men who had been watching him.

Nearly every one of these rendezvous had, somewhere near it, a dirt-roofed cabin of cottonwood logs with the inevitable hitching-rack, the pole corral and the stable, which was but a cavern in the center of a haystack. The owners had homesteaded the land and were doing a bit of ranching on their own account. They belonged to that leathern-faced breed who lived on fried salt pork, soda biscuits and the villainous coffee which used to come in paper packages.

If their house lacked neatness one could be sure of finding the firearms speckless and well oiled. And if the proprietors were slow in giving information they made it up by a swift incisiveness when it came to asking questions.

These men—there were seldom less than two of them, and there were often a half-dozen about the place—were not always active horse-thieves. But they were willing to take over a band of stolen animals and pasture them until the proper time came, when they would drive them on to another stopping-place or move them to the nearest market. And they were always ready to ride to the nearest town for cartridges, provisions, whisky—or information.

The cabin, because of its location and the accommodating character of the owners, became the nucleus for the bad characters of the neighborhood—which in those days comprised an area of several hundred square miles. The kind of cowboy who was too wild for an era when Indian-fighting and the old-fashioned range wars were done with, was apt to ride hither after he had got into some scrape. The sleek-haired individual who spent his days at dealing tinhorn stud when he was not working on the range, came to know the place well.

If you have not read Owen Wister's "Virginian"—which is unlikely if you love the old West—you can become intimately

acquainted with those two types by knowing *Steve* and *Trampas*. Such men as they drove bunches of stolen horses to these rendezvous year after year. There they met others of their breed, and those of them who were still fresh in lawlessness grew more seasoned in bad company.

So it was that different sections got their bunches of horse-thieves and their hiding-places whose locations were an open secret; yet they were never visited by honest men or posses.

THE Hole in the Wall was perhaps the most famous of these spots after Jackson's Hole became law-abiding. It was a granite cañon in the eastern slope of the Big Horn Mountains not many miles from the town of Buffalo, Wyoming. Some distance above its narrow mouth the ravine opened to a flat where there was room for fields and pasture. There was but one way to enter, and, although many of the accounts which have been written were sadly overdrawn, there is no doubt that there were times when no sheriff's posse could have survived the passage of the steep-walled gap to reach the little basin where the settler's cabins stood among the pines.

The Lost Cabin country was less known; but although it got no fame in print the place saw its full share of wild goings-on. It lay north of the Owl Creek Mountains, where the hills rise toward the Big Horn Range's western slopes.

The old-timers tell a story of two young fellows in the bunch that held forth here who fell out and decided to settle the matter with their forty-fives. They went into the hills together and made their own rules for the duel. They were to stand back to back and at a given word start walking away from each other. When each man had gone twenty paces he was to turn. If his opponent had not faced about, he was to wait. Then, when they confronted each other, they were to begin firing.

If you study for a moment over the opportunities for cheating and consider the temptation, you will realize the caliber of the contestants. For when their companions found them both were dead—one with four bullets and the other with five in his body.

Down in the country of the Orange Cliffs, south of Green River, Utah, was The Robbers' Roost. It occupied the top of a lofty mesa, and the man who wanted to gain this refuge must go to a little adobe building on a hillside half a day's journey distant. "Horse-Thief" Brown's Cabin was the name the structure went by.

There he must wait for night-fall; then build three fires which he was to blanket—each in its proper turn and for the proper time. The band who used the Roost when this was true had their own standards of membership, as is proven by the following story:

A young fellow who bore the name of a family known throughout the nation, for which reason he shall go nameless in this narrative, took part in a bank hold-up down Provo way. When he and his confederate rode away from the scene of the crime something went wrong and they missed their saddle-horses. So they commandeered a buggy.

The hue and cry went forth. A posse was hard at their heels. Farmers who were in the fields at their plowing, unhooked the traces and leaped upon the backs of their work animals. The whole countryside was roused. The two fugitives were driven to a bluff-top where they found themselves in thickets of juniper, surrounded by armed men. One was killed. The other—the youth from the good family—received the contents of a shotgun in his groin. A few minutes later as he was creeping through the bushes he was confronted by a deputy sheriff who held a leveled rifle upon him. Half-dead from loss of blood, he surrendered; and he spent some years in the State penitentiary.

At the end of his term he went to a small town on the Denver Rio Grande and sought out a saloon-keeper who did a good deal of quiet business with the men from Robbers' Roost. It was his idea to seek admittance to the band; but when the liquor dealer had communicated with the outlaws he brought back this message—

"We don't let any man ride with us who dogged it like you did."

These were typical way-stations in that underground railway. But they were never really linked together until the latter eighties, when the so-called Wild Bunch came into being. How many men there were in this loosely organized band it would be hard to say; the number varied from time to time.

Among the more prominent members were the Currie Brothers, Butch Cassidy, Bob Lee, Harry Longanbaugh, Camela

Hanks and Ben Kirkpatrick. The last two came up from Texas. Cassidy was a Utah product. The Currie boys hailed from Missouri, but had wandered over a good deal of the West before they drifted into outlawry.

None of those named belonged to the breed of the local horse-thieves who were making life a burden for the big cattlemen. They were what you might call men of parts. And when one of them appeared in a place he usually made friends among the better class of cowboys.

By 1889 there were two or more members of this outfit in the neighborhood of every one of the different rendezvous. For three or four years they kept busy at horse-stealing, shifting the looted bands from place to place. The old atlas will indicate the routes which they used.

North of Sundance, Wyoming, there was a nook in the Black Hills where Dakota horses were received. From that point they were driven to the Hole in the Wall just west of Buffalo; thence on to the Lost Cabin country north of the Owl Mountains. Leaving this refuge, the thieves could travel through open sage-brush hills, over wide plains and among the painted buttes of the Bad Lands, passing Green River, skirting the Red Desert south of Evanston, until they reached Brown's Park in the northwestern corner of Colorado.

There was another holdout place over in Castle Valley, Utah, where an outfit by the name of Swasey did business for several years. Or one could make the drive on southward from Brown's Park to the Uncompaghre plateau. From either this point or Swasey's the Robbers' Roost was accessible. Similarly Utah or Colorado horses could be taken clear to Dakota. But the great majority of the animals which the band handled came from Wyoming.

How many horses traveled over sections of this outlaw trail has never been known. But old-timers in the Wind River country will tell you of seeing two hundred going by in a bunch. And there is a good deal back of the statement of the Wyoming cattlemen that the horse-thieves were threatening to put them out of business by the year 1890. At that time the general attitude of hostility to the big cowmen had reached a pitch where it was well-nigh impossible to get juries who would convict the criminals when they were caught.

That was the condition so far as horses were concerned when the thing came to its ugly climax. But there was another and perhaps an even graver element in the situation at this time. Cattle-rustling had grown to enormous proportions.

The cow-thieves had appeared right in the beginning, as they did everywhere else in the West. In those days away back in the seventies the big outfits were without competition and the range was unrestricted. The owners were omnipotent. And they handled the situation after the regular Western fashion, which is to say that they protected their property and looked out for their own interests, and did not trouble the courts with many cases.

During that golden era which extended into the early eighties, when beef was high and the trail herds were coming up from Texas, most of the wealthier stockmen had grown up in the saddle. They had what is called cow sense. And the business paid mightily. Cheyenne saw lively times then.

Coincident with the appearance of the settlers, which has been described, came the advent of absent owners. Everybody was going to make a fortune out of beef. The old-style cowman began disappearing; many of the large outfits passed into the hands of corporations. The responsibility of handling them was given to general managers. It was a case of producing dividends for stockholders, who could not have understood the effect of changing range conditions on the business if it had been explained to them.

And there was a great change taking place. Those barbed-wire fences enclosing the settlers' fields were raising havoc in some sections. Once a cow's accustomed routine is interfered with, the animal seems to lose what semblance of sense it ever had. At the same time the range was being overstocked. Which further complicated matters.

Right then and there trouble began. There was some rough work—fences were cut; settlers were driven out of the country. It occurred in only a few places, but it roused widespread hostility among the homesteaders; and that feeling was shared by many who were in neither the cattle nor the farming business.

Now rustling began to increase by leaps and bounds. Many an enterprising citizen, whose only assets were a good strong rawhide rope and a branding-iron, took advantage of the state of public feeling and

went to building up one of those herds where there were two or three calves to every cow.

Mavericking, which has gone on ever since brands were first invented, was practised in Wyoming chiefly at the expense of the large outfits. It is, however, only fair to remark in passing that several general managers of these big concerns had invited such tactics by offering to their cowboys bounties on motherless calves.

By 1885 rustling was being carried on all over Wyoming to an extent which seriously threatened profits. And profits—as has been said—were being even more seriously menaced by the constriction of the range.

Lack of efficiency on the part of many managers helped the thing along. Some men had taken to selling feeders to produce the usual yearly dividends, which further depleted the herds.

It was natural enough that the settler should be blamed for all of this. And he was blamed. The statement went forth that nearly every settler was a cow-thief.

And this accusation, which was aired in the State capitol building during legislative sessions, increased the rancor of the little men against the large outfits. In its turn that growing dislike made the settler more prone to shut his eyes to the stealing that was going on about him.

Some sections of the State—for the trouble came to a head after 1890, when Wyoming was admitted to the Union—were worse than others. In Johnson County, which then occupied four times the area it now does, more stolen beef was sold than anywhere else. Stockmen claimed that their losses here reached ten thousand head, and there is reason to believe that figure was not far from the truth.

In brief the foregoing is a history of horse-stealing and cattle-rustling, together with the attitude of the settlers which had much to do with making their growth possible. It was in 1892 that the big stockmen took their final measures; but, in order to judge fairly their frame of mind when they made that hideous mistake, it is just as well to follow their fight against the lawlessness from the beginning.

AS THE primitive pioneer days passed and the courts began to appear, the large stockmen genuinely tried to get justice through the legal channels. But jury trials always depend more or less on the state of public feeling, and, for the reasons which have been outlined the cowmen were unpopular.

In every county seat there was at least one criminal lawyer who made a specialty of rustling cases; and he knew nearly every prospective talesman in the district. The sheriff was facing big odds from the start; for he had to catch his man, and to do it he usually was obliged to contend against a countryside whose populace were more anxious to help the fugitive than they were to aid the law. Once a thief was in custody the prosecution was well-nigh impotent for the simple reason that the defense was bound to slip in at least two or three jurors who would never return a verdict of guilty no matter what the evidence.

To give an idea of the state of affairs, there is the case of Butch Cassidy, perhaps the most famous of Wyoming's horse-thieves, who was once in need of a good mount if he wanted to distance his pursuers—and got it from the sheriff of the county through which he was passing at the time.

In Lander, so old-timers say, there was a period of three or four years, during which scores of thieves were tried and not one conviction attained—until the lawyers themselves got weary of the whole business, and several of the local rustlers went to prison by a sort of common consent. In Johnson County out of one hundred and eight cases tried in four years there was not a single verdict of guilty.

The law was dead so far as rustling was concerned. And the cattlemen naturally resorted to violence. At first they went about it with a degree of repression, and there was a measure of justice in the lynchings.

In 1886 the writer, who was then a boy, ran across a typical incident of the times. My father, who was geologizing, had left the O D ranch on the upper Rosebud in southeastern Montana, with a buckboard and a span of mules; and had taken me with him. A day or two later we were near the headwaters of the river, and we met an outfit coming from the south—a two-horse lumber-wagon with a plow lying on its side in the box and not much more in the way of baggage; on the driver's seat a rat-eyed man and a blowsy woman whose full face was partly hidden by a faded blue sunbonnet.

My father pulled up and talked with them for some time. We had run out of coffee; they gave us a package containing some and refused any pay.

It was perhaps an hour later when we met another outfit coming northward. There were four horsemen of the usual type, lean, seasoned riders; and besides his revolver every one of them had a rifle in its sheath under the stirrup leather.

We halted again and my father passed the time of day with them. Just before they started on one of them asked us whether we had met the pair in the lumber-wagon; and on receiving an affirmative answer he told us how those two came to be traveling across-country.

The woman went by the name of Black Hills Sal. The man's name I have forgotten, if it was given. She had lived for three or four years over on the Powder River in Wyoming, but he was a newcomer—her latest consort. That was why he was there on the seat of the lumber-wagon instead of hanging to the limb of a cottonwood along with three companions whose history and antecedents were better known than his own.

For the cattlemen had learned beyond doubt that the woman's cabin was a rendezvous for horse-thieves, and they had descended upon it the night before. They could not see their way to hanging her because of her sex; so they had spared her and the rat-eyed man on condition the two of them leave the country. The posse who had met us were following them to see that they did not make the mistake of trying to back-track into Wyoming.

There were a good many instances of that character at the time; but the cattlemen of any one section were powerless against the combination of rustlers and horse-thieves. And the State-wide association which was backing legal prosecutions was in nearly as bad a fix. By 1889 the larger ranch owners were getting desperate.

When men have reached that pitch they are very likely to make blunders. It was in 1889 that ten cattlemen rode up to Jim Averill's home on the Sweetwater. He ran a little store and sold some whisky. But the establishment did not bear his name; it was known as Cattle Kate's place. She lived in a lean-to beside the store, and many men came to visit her. The stockmen claimed that lawless cowboys gave her stolen calves in payment for her wares.

Nor was that all; they said that the place was nothing more nor less than a road-house to shelter rustlers. How true the accusations are is beyond the narrator; but at any rate when the ten visitors departed from the cabin that night they left behind them the bodies of the man and the woman hanging to a cottonwood.

Hanging women never was popular anywhere. The lynching aroused a storm of resentment and did a good deal to turn the sympathies of neutrals toward the rustlers. In the mean time the cattlemen aggravated matters still further by hiring a number of so-called detectives, who set about it to exterminate the thieves.

That was the beginning of the Johnson County War, and the stories of the events which followed differ diametrically to this day, according to the faction which tells them. So this narrative will stick as nearly as possible to the main facts wherein both sides agree.

During the latter part of 1890 eight or ten cattlemen's-association detectives were busy gathering evidence in the northeastern part of the State, until they had a list of about one hundred individuals who they alleged were either stock-thieves or active accomplices. It was a dangerous task, and the men who carried it out were cool hands; there is no doubt of that.

High on the list of the accused were the names of Tom Waggoner and Nate Champion. The former had come up from Nebraska several years since and gone into the horse business not far from the town of Newcastle. His place was south of the Belle Fourche River, right in the heart of the neighborhood where the old outlaw trail has its eastern terminus.

In this section, where the stolen horses of Wyoming and Dakota were being interchanged, his herd increased by leaps and bounds until he owned one thousand head. And the hard-faced, silent men who had been collecting data for the cattle-owners maintained that he was one of the leaders in that loose organization which was looting throughout five States; that his ranch was nothing more nor less than a holdout station for the Wild Bunch.

In June, 1891, three cattle-association detectives went to his home one evening with a fraudulent warrant and took him forth on the pretext that they were arresting officers. A week later a passing rider found

his body hanging to a tree in a gulch a few miles distant.

At dawn on a November morning of that same year four of these detectives tried to get Champion in very much the same manner. He was a Texas man, and he had come into the Powder River country with a trail herd in the early eighties. For some years he had worked on the range, and those who knew him say that he was a top hand.

Then he had drifted into the company of those who made their money by altering brands, and one can get an idea of the peculiar state of public feeling when he realizes that, among the riders who used to drop into Buffalo and Sundance, there was none more widely liked than he; yet at the time this incident took place, men called him the king of the Johnson County rustlers.

The quartet who came to lynch him found him that cold Autumn morning in the cabin of a man by the name of Hall on Powder River. Champion and Ross Gilbertson were asleep when the posse threw open the door. They rushed on in with their six-shooters leveled.

"Give up," one of them shouted. "We've got you this time."

And with that the shooting began. Champion's guns were under his pillow, but he had them both out and in action so quickly that the two foremost members of the lynching party went out of commission after firing one shot apiece. They fell back through the doorway, wounded, both of them; and their companions helped them away to the nearest shelter.

Within the month young "Ranger" Jones was slain from ambush while he was driving in a buckboard at the crossing of Muddy Creek, not far from Buffalo; and J. A. Tisdale was shot down from behind two mornings later near the Cross H ranch in the same neighborhood.

How closely these last two were identified with the active rustlers has never been established; there is no doubt in the mind of the average man as to Champion and Waggoner. But all four were well liked by the settlers, and the local authorities were hostile to the cowmen. Which state of affairs put the latter faction on the defensive at once; for warrants were issued; arrests were made.

And the courts began to take a hand in the affairs. In justice to the cattlemen it must be noted in passing that neither sheriffs nor the courts had ever been so zealous in the years of their brief existence as they were now. And in fairness to the settlers one must remember that they believed—not without cause either—that the cattlemen were starting a campaign to drive them out of the country.

Such a campaign was what the thing resolved itself into during the next few months. Matters had come to a pass where it was worth the life of a cattle-association detective to show himself in some of the towns; and several of the general managers of the larger ranches were in nearly as bad a position. It was a case of two factions of angry men, arrayed against each other.

The cattlemen had the State Government, and through senatorial influence in Washington they had the ear of President Harrison. With these forces to back them they set about it to raise a company that should drive the cow and horse thieves from the State forever. Some of them believed, and so stated, that with the departure of the rustlers would come a general emigration of small settlers which would leave the range as it had been in the good old days before the fences.

So their agents went forth and hired men in Texas, Idaho and Colorado; the sort of men whom one could get for such purposes in those times. Back in the old Panhandle days the cowboys used to call them barroom gladiators. There were some communities where they went by the name of two-gun men. Most of them were killers and ready to hire out for five dollars a day without asking many questions as to the justice of the cause under which they were enlisting.

In the mean time the settlers throughout the Powder River and Belle Fourche country were going armed whenever they left their cabins. In Buffalo men carried rifles and wore six-shooters on the streets.

The traveler whose road crossed a coulée took care to make a long détour passing the head of the gulch if possible. And he who rode through a thicket of wild plum-bushes in those days unless it was absolutely necessary was accounted foolhardy.

The air was tense with expectancy. Rumors ran on one another's heels. And the general belief grew stronger as the months went by that the cattlemen were embarking on a campaign to drive every nester from the State.

So both factions were preparing for the struggle, and early in April the whole thing came to a head.

ON THE fifth of the month, late in the afternoon, the passenger-train pulled into Cheyenne with a special coach whose window-shades were tightly drawn. The car was shunted into a siding down by the stockyards, and its passengers disembarked.

There were nearly thirty of them, and the majority had come from Texas. None among the number but called himself a gunman; and there were some whose reputations as killers bore out the assertion. They were hard men, no doubt of that, but—as has been stated—they belonged to the species whose members were ready to sell their deadly talents to the highest bidder.

Here at the shipping-pens they met another breed. Cowboys from the larger ranches, stock-growers who had spent years on Wyoming ranges and general managers of large outfits that occupied the territory along the Powder River, had been busy for the past three days branding and loading saddle-horses, preparing wagon outfits, sorting out bedding and making ready for the expedition. The laden stock-cars were coupled to the passenger-coach; the train started for Casper bearing some of the best men in the Northwest—and some of the Southwest's poorest riffraff.

They reached Casper late in the night. Between that hour and dawn they put in their time unloading the supplies and ammunition, storing them in wagons, driving the horses down the chutes into the shipping-pens. Before the sun had risen they had caught up the last animal and saddled him. Every rider carried two Colt's six-shooters and a Winchester rifle.

They started forth into the northward while morning was still young. A few miles out they halted for breakfast; then pressed on for forty miles to Tisdale's ranch where Mike Shonsy, foreman of the Western Union Beef Company, met them with word that Nate Champion, the so-called king of the Johnson County rustlers, was camped with one or two companions on the north fork of Powder River. The whole force was held here at Tisdale's while scouts went forward to locate the party and learn their strength.

On the afternoon of the eighth the scouts came back with word that the wanted man and his partner, Nick Ray, were in a cabin at Nolan's K C ranch. The whole company of fifty-odd set out after nightfall, and before the break of dawn they had the place surrounded.

Nate Champion has been mentioned as a rustler. It is hard to say how much of honesty and how much of real dishonesty comprised the mixture which made up his disposition. Men got off wrong very easily in those days, and there are some very good citizens of Wyoming today who can tell of years when they did a deal of fast riding—ahead of sheriff's posses.

This man had many friends; that much is sure. And he was a man. He proved it on that day.

Forty-eight men lay hidden as the dawn leaked over the sky's rim. They made a ring about the cabin. Some were in the brush beside the creek, which formed a loop in the center of which the buildings stood; a number were in the stable and others crouched in the thickets at the edge of a little ravine.

A wagon stood near the corral. It had not been there the day before. From mouth to mouth the order passed that none begin firing until the command was given; for the leaders wished to learn the identity of the vehicle's owners. The light grew along the summits of the low sage-brush hills; it crept down toward the buildings.

The cabin door opened and a man with a bucket walked down to the creek. The nearest gunmen covered him from their ambuscade, and he obeyed their quiet order to give himself up. He proved to be a freighter by the name of Jones, and he said that his partner, one Walker, was in the house; they had spent the night there.

Some minutes passed. Then another man appeared.

"That's him," Jones told his captors, "my pardner."

They let him walk down to the stable, where he was taken.

The sun was rising now. Its first rays were bathing the slope before the cabin when the door opened for the third time, and Champion's partner, Nick Ray, came forth. He started slowly down the path toward the barn. When he had gone perhaps a dozen paces a rifle cracked by the creek. He pitched forward and lay quite still.

Then Nate Champion showed himself. Rifle in hand, he sprang from the inner darkness to the patch of sunlight that had just lighted upon the threshold. A dozen smoke-puffs appeared by the creek-bank; the cracks in the stable's chinking emitted little clouds of tenuous white fumes. And to the rattle of those shots his Winchester made answer. He fired four times and leaped back into the room.

The noise seemed to have roused Nick Ray from his stupor, for now he came crawling slowly up the pathway toward the cabin. When he was within a yard of the threshold he sank down again and remained motionless.

Then the door flew open and Champion ran to his partner. He picked up the limp form in his arms, and the bullets of the besiegers kicked up little spurts of dust all around him as he bore it back into the shelter of those four log walls.

The rattle of the rifles kept up intermittently all that morning and during the noon hour. At intervals Champion fired back through one of the windows. He was a dead shot; there was no man in the ring around the place who dared to show his head so long as they knew that he was living. So he stood them off, while Nick Ray lay dying in the room; and in the middle of the afternoon a thing happened which turned the tide of the whole Johnson County war.

A settler by the name of Jack Flagg was traveling down the road, which passed the cabin, with his young stepson. The boy was driving a span of horses hitched to the running-gear of a lumber-wagon; and the man rode a little distance behind on a good saddle-horse. For some moments before their appearance the firing had ceased. So the two of them came right through the ring of besiegers before they knew what was going on.

Now the cattlemen had cut the telegraph wires before leaving Casper and had captured the few men whom they had met on their way hither. It was necessary, if they would succeed in their plan of swooping down on the rustlers, that they prevent any news of their advance from preceding them. So when they saw Flagg and the boy they called out to them to surrender. But instead of complying the youngster whipped up the horses.

A dozen of the Texan gunmen lined their sights to get him, and the rattle of the rifles grew louder as Flagg burst into sight following the wagon on the dead run. By some strange fortune none of the bullets found their mark; and now six of the besiegers leaped on their horses. The youngster was still flogging the team, and they were making breakneck speed; after him came his stepfather; and behind him the pursuers.

Flagg sank his spurs into his pony's flanks and by a desperate burst of speed gained the wagon. Then he shouted to the boy to hand him his rifle. Team and saddle-horse slackened up long enough for him to take the gun which the youth tossed him.

The pursuing party came into sight around a turn of the road just as Flagg was bringing the weapon to his shoulder. They did not wait to try conclusions with him, but turned and raced back to safety; and so it came that while Nate Champion was finishing his big fight, Flagg rode on at top speed to spread the news of the invasion among the settlers.

The siege continued all that afternoon; and as the sun was setting the men near the barn took the wagon of the captured teamsters and loaded it with pitch pine. They touched a match, and four of them leaped behind the shelter of the blazing load. They pushed the heavy vehicle up to the cabin and ran for their lives.

The building was dry as tinder. In a few seconds it was a mass of flames.

Then Champion came forth into the open. He ran toward the ravine; but before he had gone three-quarters of the distance he fell with half a dozen bullets in his body. When they searched his pockets the men who had killed him found, in one of them, a little note-book. A bullet-hole had perforated its pages, mutilating the words which he had set down there during the progress of this last day of his life. And here is what he wrote:

Me and Nick was getting breakfast when the attack took place. Two men here with us—Bill Jones and another man. The old man went after water and did not come back. His friend went out to see what was the matter and did not come back.

Nick started out and I told him to look out, that I thought there was some one at the stable and would not let them come back. Nick is shot, but not dead yet. He is awful sick. I must go and wait on him.

It is now about two hours since the first shot. Nick is still alive; they are shooting and are all around the house. Boys, there is bullets coming in

like hail. Them fellows is in such shape I can't get at them. They are shooting from the stable and from the river back of the house.

Nick is dead. He died about nine o'clock. I see a smoke down at the stable. I think they have fired it. I don't think they intend to let me get away this time.

It is now about noon. There is some one at the stable yet; they are throwing a rope out at the door and drawing it back. I guess it is to draw me out. I wish that duck would get out further so I could get a shot at him.

Boys, I don't know what they have done with them two fellows that stayed here last night. Boys, I feel pretty lonesome just now. I wish there was some one here with me so we could watch all sides at once. They may fool around until I get a good shot before they leave.

It is about three o'clock now. There was a man in a buckboard and one on horseback just passed. They fired on them as they went by. I don't know if they killed them or not. I seen lots of men come out on horses on the other side of the river and take after them. I shot at the men in the stable just now; don't know if I got any or not. I must go back and look out again.

It don't look as if there is much show of my getting away. I see twelve or fifteen men. One looks like (*this name was scratched out by some one who found the note-book*) I don't know whether it is or not.

I hope they did not catch them fellows that run over the bridge toward Smith's. If I had a pair of glasses I believe I would know some of those men. They are coming back. I've got to look out.

Well they have just got through shelling the house like hail. I hear them splitting wood. I guess they are going to fire the house tonight. I think I will make a break when night comes, if alive.

Shooting again. I think they will fire the house this time. It's not night yet. The house is all fired. Good-by boys if I never see you again.

NATHAN D. CHAMPION.

And that was the way Nate Champion died. He stood them off long enough to let the news of their coming pass on before them; and he left words which kindled such a flame of hatred as could not be extinguished for years.

THAT night the cattlemen's forces started on toward Buffalo, sixty miles distant. They never got there. Twenty-two miles from the town a messenger met them with tidings that two hundred armed men were coming forth to meet them. Jack Flagg had given the alarm.

So they made a détour to the T. A. Ranch in a bend of Crazy Woman's Fork twelve miles from the village; and here the settlers found them the next day.

They came from Buffalo, from Sheridan and from a hundred cabins throughout the Powder River country. Old "Arapahoe" Brown, a veteran of early-day Indian wars, was in command. He disposed them in a wide semicircle along the crest of a ridge commanding the ranch buildings.

For two days a constant rifle fire was kept up without any particular damage. Then Brown, who was old in rough-and-ready strategy, conceived the idea of a movable breastwork, erected on the running-gears of a stout lumber-wagon. The vehicle was loaded with giant powder. Behind the barricade of logs a dozen men could find shelter while they shoved it forward toward the house.

But just at this juncture three troops of cavalry from Fort McKinney appeared on the scene. President Harrison had ordered them out in response to a telegraphic appeal from acting Governor Amos W. Barber.

The settlers had the wagon with its fortification and its load of explosives ready when the troopers rode in over the ridge. Colonel J. J. Van Horn, who was in command of the detachment, came on in advance with a white flag; and Sheriff Angus of Johnson County, who had joined the settlers with a posse of twelve men and warrants for the members of the cowmen's forces, rode out to meet him. Angus demanded that the latter be turned over to him as prisoners.

The demand was not granted. The captives were taken in charge by the military and were later given over to the county authorities. All of them were released on bonds.

Within a few months the Texans and the other outside gunmen left the State. And when the cattlemen appeared for trial the cases were never pressed.

But the stockmen were beaten. Public opinion was hot against them all over the Northwest. The wiser ones among them saw that the days of the open range were practically gone, and took their herds to other States. Some went into business in Australia and the Argentine.

There was a strange sequel to all of this long warfare. In the latter nineties some members of the horse-thief bands who had been doing such a brisk business throughout the State, took to train and bank robbing; and when they fled from the scene of a holdup they sometimes used one of the old rendezvous which had served them so well in former days.

Nor was that all. They had their friends in many cowtowns. The events which had put the cattlemen pretty well out of business had if anything increased the number of

those adherents. A disposition to let an outlaw go by unrecognized if one met him on the street with a price on his head, was pretty widespread, and so for nearly ten years the Wild Bunch found shelter, often right under the noses of pursuing officers.

It was after 1900 before the last of the desperadoes vanished. And at about the same time the surviving cowmen were finally defeated in an ill-advised war against the sheep-herders who had invaded their range.

That ended cattle-raising on the old style in Wyoming. The fences of the settlers became more numerous. The sheep herds grazed over what little of the open country remained.

Cowman, cowboy and outlaw vanished. It was inevitable. Civilization had come, and the Old West was gone forever.

MAIL FOR THE WHIRLWIND

A Complete Novelette

by Joel Townsley Rogers

Author of "Bramble-Thistles Stick," "Lover's Gold from Turon," etc.

OLD Martin Martel wanted little Sin-Din-Ding. He cast on her his wrinkled old, red old eyes one twilight as she stood by the ocean and decided she was good enough for Martin Martel. Martin Martel was a gourmet of women.

"What are you looking at, granddaughter of Hwang-Hu-Li," he asked, coming up softly behind her and putting his chin on her shoulder, "so far out in the twilight that gathers from the star of love?"

Little Sin-Din-Ding whirled quickly, bashfully kotowing.

"I am looking for West to come flying home in the *Mad Gull*. Shadows have left the sun-dial long ago; and my reverend old grandfather says hurricane is near."

"Don't worry about young fools like West," said Martel, his itching, evil fingers feeling the plumpness of her shoulder. "All these flying men are crazy, and T'ien, the old God, watches over them. I'll tell you that I, Martin Martel, look on you with agreeable eyes, little Sin-Din-Ding."

"Thank you, reverend old man," whispered little Sin-Din-Ding, looking bashfully down and stepping on her feet. Her heart should have been very happy; but it wasn't. She would rather have such praise from Rudolph West, though he was not so old and reverend as old Martin Martel.

Martel didn't like her calling him old, even though it was respectful.

"Your old grandfather, Hwang-Hu-Li, is right when he speaks about hurricane."

Old Martel flung open his khaki coat and thumped his skinny ribs.

"Looking at you, little Sin-Din-Ding, in this heart is hurricane!"

Sin-Din-Ding hid her hands in the sleeves of her gown. Modestly she rocked on her heels, as a young girl should do when she is honored by the notice of her elders. In spite of her demure mask Sin-Din-Ding felt like giggling. Old Martin Martel didn't remind her at all of a hurricane, but of a sneezing cat. Rudolph West, who flew up so high his ship-keel furrowed the clouds—*he* was like hurricane.

Old Martel wet his lips. He put his hands on little Sin-Din-Ding's shoulders, playing purple music with his finger-tips. His breath came quick and hot as bellows in a furnace. Sweeter this thirst than absinthe. He folded his wiry arms about little Sin-Din-Ding, clasped her to his flat chest, kissed her in the white man's fashion.

The girl jumped away when she could. Bowing timidly to Martel, she clacked away up the seaplane runway. Tears were on her cheeks. The passion of old Martin Martel was Greek fire, which such moisture could not quench.

Martel shivered all over. Gently he touched his lips with his fingers. His heart pumped like youth. He started to run after Sin-Din-Ding, but slipped on the mossy, slimy planks of the runway, coming down on his nose. McCarthy, with his derby over one eye, heavily chewing gum, strolled down the runway and helped old Martel to his feet with much laughter.

Old Martel heard in the sky the roar of the *Mad Gull's* engines. Out of the night, out of the cloud, young West was swooping to the sea. Old Martel was afraid; he had heard that in Manila Rudolph West had killed a man. Silently he waited while the *Mad Gull* skimmed over the waves to the runway. Martel didn't follow after Sin-Din-Ding.

That night old Martel wrote a letter to Douglas, general manager of the South China Airways, asking that Rudolph West be transferred to Funnychow or Hongkong. He paused his typewriter a moment. Far away, in front of the hut of old Hwang-Hu-Li, Martel heard young West strumming a guitar with a song to little Sin-Din-Ding.

"—O little Sin-Din-Ding,
High on the breast of T'ien
I thought I saw your face,
But it was the rising sun——"

OLD Martel wanted little Sin-Din-Ding. Her childish beauty was ripening like a peach, her pretty smiling face was shadowing with womanhood's fine spirituality. She had learned to blush at sight of men. From old Martin Martel she had tasted her first kiss in the white man's fashion.

The heavy tropic Summer heat of Lao-Hu-Chung, which mildewed a man's bones and rotted wine in the wine-bottles, would be rendered more agreeable for old Martin Martel by little Sin-Din-Ding. His two girls, Wai-Sen and Pravata, the Siamese, had been with him almost a year, and Martel was growing tired of them. Always the same; they did not change their faces. Can a man see the same faces night and morning, *hein*, and not grow tired of them? Besides, Pravata was taking too heavily to drink; her inroads into Martel's pink Oyen absinthe were worse than death.

Having a great deal of Breton in him, old Martel tried to drive a hard bargain with Sin-Din-Ding's revered old grandfather, Hwang-Hu-Li, the ancient fisher of tiger-carp in muddy Hwang-Chung-Kiang. No Scot, no Jew, no Yank drives harder bargain than a Breton. A hard bargain for a cow, a hilly quarter-acre or a woman. All sensible men drive hard bargains for women. Why should one pay too much for a girl, *hein*, when they grow like peaches, each Spring a new crop of them?

Hwang-Hu-Li was himself a good bargainer. Much chaffering over the price of tiger-carp had made his squinting eyes hard and shrewd. He knew the market value of girls. Hwang-Hu-Li means Yellow Fox Kitten. But the old fisherman was no longer a kitten.

"Ee, sacred Martel," whined old Hwang-Hu-Li, scratching his dirty head and dipping into the pot for a lump of candied pork, "you talk as if you were buying a little mess of carp. A bushel of copper cash for my granddaughter! Girl-children are not caught like tiger-fish, fifty in a haul of the seine. Ee! Gladly would I oblige my sacred friend. But my fathers were honorable men. A bushel of cash!"

"Come, come," said old Martel, licking grease from his fingers and rubbing his hands together. "We're not going to fight about a few brass coins, *hein?* Sin-Din-Ding is a pest to you, and I will take her off your hands——"

"My only granddaughter! The sustainer of the tombs of my honorable ancestors!"

"She gobbles a prodigious amount of rice, as much as would feed a fine fat pig. Blue cotton cloth from English Manchester costs you these days many weary hauls in Hwang-Chung River. She is not strong; you can't yoke her to the plow."

Old Yellow Fox wrung his hands. He squeezed up his face as he might squeeze a rag, so that no feature was recognizable. Sorrowfully he sucked his tea.

"Ee, sacred brother!" he wept, in the Mandarin speech of which he was so proud. "My only granddaughter. In my youth I was extravagant, underestimating the gifts sent by God; I sent my girl-children to float on bamboo rafts down muddy Hwang-Chung to the sea. And of my only son have I this only granddaughter to tend the tombs of my fathers and feed me in the islands of forgetting. Do not mock me with offers of copper cash!"

"Who was talking about copper? Bah, I am generous. I pay a fair price. Ten—ten—eleven tael of Shanghai silver!"

"Ee, sacred brother!"

"Twelve!"

"But the Shanghai silver is underweight," Hwang-Hu-Li said sensibly. "Could I sell my only granddaughter for twelve tael, even of Pekin, and sleep comfortably with God? In the islands of forgetting my honored ancestors would lay their heads upon their knees. Let us not talk of it."

Almost as much as he loved absinthe and women, old Martin Martel loved a bargain. But Hwang-Hu-Li, that Fox, was shrewd as Martel. He had the goods and the goods were wanted. Hwang-Hu-Li could afford to wait.

Thinking of little Sin-Din-Ding, old Martel's blood grew hot. Scarcely could he keep his hands from shaking. The smile he wore was hard as Breton rock. Hwang-Hu-Li watched old Martel with sly grins.

"I hope pigs root up the bones of your honorable ancestors," said Martel.

He grew angrier. Hwang-Hu-Li was a sensible man and did not believe in religion. He was Confucianist, Taoist, Christian, Buddhist as suited business. Old Martel hated Hwang-Hu-Li's unaspirated, whining singsong. The yellow old hypocrite!

"Ee!" squeaked Hwang-Hu-Li, nibbling an almond cake. "I have not asked an offer yet from the sacred madman West," he said thoughtfully. "I am a poor man. I must think long about selling Sin-Din-Ding. West would give ten times twelve tael of Pekin silver."

"I'll top that young fool's best offer!" Martel cried, choking.

"And Sin-Din-Ding would kiss my feet if I sold her to West," said the Yellow Fox, grinning till all his pointed teeth showed.

"What do you care what she wants?" Martel snarled.

"The sacred madman would take her for first wife," jabbered Hwang-Hu-Li; "perhaps make her his wife alone, after the custom of many men of your race. She would give me great grandchildren to worship my spirit when it lies in the islands of forgetting. They would sacrifice at my grave with cash and roast pork and silk coats. My spiritual belly would not be hungry in eternity."

"Blah, blah, blah!" stuttered old Martel furiously.

He twisted his handkerchief into a knot. He slapped his knees. Old Martin Martel had met his match.

"A hundred Mexican!" Martel offered, beside himself.

"For the granddaughter of a Manchu who wears the yellow sash! It is dishonorable. Besides, Mad West would give more."

"A hundred and fifty!" said Martel, though it hurt him.

Old Hwang-Hu-Li lighted a cigaret nearly a foot long. Curling smoke trickling from his nostrils made him look like a yellow devil.

"Ee, but it pains me to pain my sacred brother, the honorable guest in my house." Hwang-Hu-Li closed his eyes, still grinning. "Sacred Martel, you must know I am not ignorant. No grass grows on my neck. In Hongkong a common slave girl is worth fifteen dollars for each year of her age."

"I am liberal!" growled old Martel. "I pay a fair price. But this is not Hongkong."

"And Sin-Din-Ding is not a common slave girl." Hwang-Hu-Li whispered. "Her skin is white as that of your own women who have been long in the sun. Her hair shines to blue lights and has a little curl——"

"Yes, I've a good idea white blood is in her, you old monkey!"

"Her lips are full. Her feet have never

been bound. She can sing white men's music."

Hwang-Hu-Li counted these virtues on his fingers.

"Her breasts are round. All these things are worth money, in Hongkong or Lao-Hu-Chung."

The mouth of Martin Martel felt thick with slaver, he was so mad. "I'm not buying the daughter of the Lord of the Yellow Loess!" he shouted.

"But the sacred madman West——"

"I'll have West sent away from Lao-Hu-Chung!"

"Other men of your race will find her charming," Hwang-Hu-Li replied imperturbably. "McCarthy or Anderson or Lauderdale. If I sell the girl too cheaply, my honorable ancestors——"

"Let's talk sense," Martel choked, working his mouth into knots. "I can overmatch those fellows, gold dollar for gold dollar. You know it, old Yellow Fox."

"Sacred brother, let not the devils of madness take you!"

"How old is she—fifteen? I'll give you twenty dollars for every year. I could buy all of Lao-Hu-Chung for that. What is Sin-Din-Ding more than your granddaughter?"

"She may be more," whispered Hwang-Hu-Li cunningly.

He slipped a fan from his neckband and tapped Martin Martel on the knee.

"So—stolen, *hein?* I thought I saw white man's blood in the peaches of her cheeks. You old dog——"

"Twenty-five dollars for each year of age," said old Hwang-Hu-Li, squinting closed his eyes. "Twenty-five dollars, American gold. Tomorrow it may be more."

Martel shouted. He slapped his face. He pulled his hair. He was more agitated than if some one had stepped on the face of his mother.

"Twenty-five times fifteen gold dollars!" he moaned. "It is as though I bought a battleship!"

"Twenty-five times sixteen," Hwang-Hu-Li corrected. "Four hundred, gold." He settled back on his haunches, violently fanning himself.

"Holy name of Gautama! Have I got to pay for the year of life in her mother?"

Old Yellow Fox patted his fan against his breast.

"It is the law."

"Listen to me, old fool fisherman of goggle-eyed carp! Here in Lao-Hu-Chung I, Martin Martel, am the law! I pay a fair price. That is enough. No pirate will hold me up!"

Hwang-Hu-Li's silk fan, striking against his breast, whirred like a bat's wing. A big yellow fly buzzed in from muddy Hwang-Chung river, laying its eggs on the dish of fat pork meat. Stolidly Hwang-Hu-Li watched it.

"I keep the white man's law in Lao-Hu-Chung!" snarled Martel, closing tight his fist. "I take the girl Sin-Din-Ding, whether you say yes or no, old Yellow Fox!"

Hwang-Hu-Li bowed his head slowly, repeatedly, like a pendulum. "I am Manchu," he whispered, with warning in his tones. "No shaved-head dog of the eighteen provinces. I wear the yellow sash. A fighting man, sacred brother. Eel I have named the price. Tomorrow it may be more."

Martin Martel rose in anger. He did not wait for his host to dismiss him, as politeness demands, but left at once.

"Same price to the sacred madman West," warned Hwang-Hu-Li, as Martel kicked out the door.

Approaching the hut of old Hwang-Hu-Li were Sin-Din-Ding and Rudolph West. Young West dropped the girl's hand when he saw Martel. Martel scowled as he passed. West's dark eyes met his steadily.

"It's about time the *Mad Gull* left for Funnychow," old Martel said quarrelsomely. "Lauderdale's been in three hours. Why aren't you at the beach?"

"Listen," said West, taking old Martel by the sleeve. "I'll take her out when it's time. I've never failed you. What's wrong with you, Martel?"

Martel looked into West's sure, set glance and was afraid. He was a little afraid of all the flying men. He turned and watched them down the dusty road. West had again taken Sin-Din-Ding's hand. Old Martel could not be sure, but he thought that beneath little Sin-Din-Ding's blue cotton gown the arm of young West encircled her waist.

TWO nights after, when West was again in Lao-Hu-Chung, he sat late in the hut of Hwang-Hu-Li, the fisherman. Much talk they had; much tea they drank.

Pravata, the Siamese, passing by the hut, heard the voices of West and old Hwang-Hu-Li raised in loud quarreling. West's roaring English oaths, Hwang-Hu-Li's shrill jabbering. Pravata slipped up close in her bare feet, peering in through slits in the bamboo walls. Her flat little yellow nose quivered with terror.

She saw old Hwang-Hu-Li hurl a porcelain lamp at his sacred guest. Then the fisher's hut was darker. But Pravata saw West's hard fingers closing about the thin throat of old Yellow Fox, closing till old Yellow Fox's squeaking subsided to gurglings. Pravata was afraid, and she saw the moon over her left shoulder, and she ran away.

In the morning Rudolph West, white-faced and furious, came down to the seaplane hangars. He roared shouts to the coolie helpers. They stowed in the mail-bags for Shanghai. Out against the rising sun West drove the *Mad Gull*, leaving a curling froth in his wake. Rose with a roar. Droned north-north-eastward up the coast, heading steadily for Funnychow.

The sun still stood far to east of Lao-Hu-Chung when Martin Martel and McCarthy found old Hwang-Hu-Li lying silent on the floor of his hut. No more for him the rising day. No more from him the striped tiger-carp would dart and quiver through the muddy waters of Hwang-Chung, fleeing his dreadful nets.

What knife had cut that withered throat across?

"Son of a dog!" swore McCarthy, who hated West.

He cocked his derby over his eye.

"Who gets little Sin-Din-Ding now, Mr. Martel?"

Martel shivered all over, answering nothing.

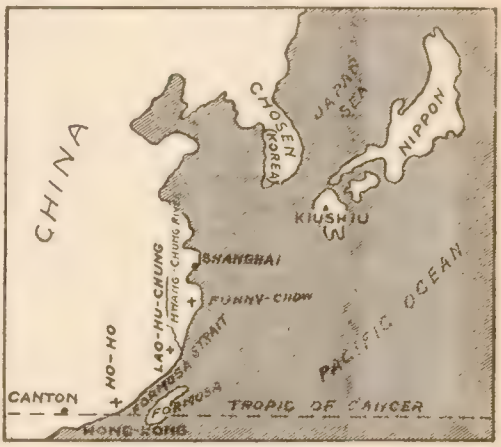
All morning they looked for little Sin-Din-Ding. But she had fled to the forests which lie west of Lao-Hu-Chung.

WHERE along the Fo-Kien coast once swept the junks of pirate fleets, with gilded prows and teakwood decks and purple sails wide-vanning to the perfumed winds, now sail the giant twin-motored seaplanes of the South China Airways.

Hongkong to Shanghai in a day, if you're willing to pay the price.

Three stops along the eight hundred miles of coast. Hongkong to Ho-Ho. Ho-Ho to Lao-Hu-Chung. Lao-Hu-Chung to Funnychow. Funnychow to Shanghai, across the Wusung triangle.

Beatty and Saburo Tonkawara, the Jap, flying between Hongkong and Ho-Ho.



HO-HO, LAO-HU-CHUNG AND FUNNYCHOW ARE FICTITIOUS.

Anderson and McCarthy between Ho-Ho and Lao-Hu-Chung.

West and Lauderdale between Lao-Hu-Chung and Funnychow.

Bleibtreu and Torol, German and Russ, making the last northward lap from Funnychow to Shanghai-of-the-sand-flats.

Good fliers all, at home in the air as on land, able to gage a cross-wind, to squash down tail first on a stormy sea, to fly through clouds with level wings, to feel their way to water in any kind of night.

These four spent half their time at Lao-Hu-Chung, Martin Martel's station—Anderson, McCarthy, Lauderdale and West. Anderson was a thin-lipped former navy warrant gunner; Lauderdale a fat ex-sergeant of the army; McCarthy a tough professional pugilist from Boston; Rudolph West the youngest boy who ever perjured his age to get into the flying. McCarthy wore an enormous derby cocked on his big head all the time, save when he was flying and perhaps when he was asleep.

Naturally he was quick with his fists. He hated young West because West had once told him he was a mucker; and truth is painful.

Eight queer men, all sorts, all kinds, from Saburo Tonkawara the Jap to Torol the Russian. They liked the air; that made them all queer enough.

Sloan had charge at Ho-Ho; Oliver, the Englishman, at Funnychow; old Martin Martel at Lao-Hu-Chung. Martin Martel was too old to fly; high air made his head giddy. His brothers had bought him holdings in the South China Airways and sent him out to Lao-Hu-Chung, hoping drink or fever would kill him decently and without scandal.

Lao-Hu-Chung—a place of death! To the west lie great forests steaming with rotten plagues. In front of it whimpers the great sea-tide which pours through Formosa Strait. Muddy Hwang-Chung is treacherous with floods.

Hwang-Chung, which empties into the sea with a roar close by the seaplane hangars, means Yellow Middle. It is middle between the wide gulfs of the Yangtse and the Canton. It is yellow at all seasons, but most yellow when the great floods come. Those terrible torrents screaming down from the hills, miles broad, tearing mighty fir-forests from its banks, foaming over whole villages, furrowing the foundations of earth, rolling, slavering, whooping with the devils of destruction! When Hwang-Chung goes mad men's bodies may be seen in it more plentiful than the bodies of those tiger-carp whose trailing rainbow fins tangle its depths like weeds.

Between moist, primordial forests and the steaming sea—Lao-Hu-Chung. Its temperature is politely said seldom to rise above one hundred degrees; but that, I think, is centigrade. In Winter it is sometimes as cool as sixty-eight.

The Airways has erected a steel hangar, two wooden runways, a machine-shop, gasoline storage-house, and an iron-roofed office-and-manager's-home, so hot that a man, boiling in bed at midnight, can light a cigaret merely by sucking at the torrid air. The two pilots waiting in Lao-Hu-Chung, West and McCarthy or Anderson and Lauderdale, were supposed to sleep there. But with Pravata and Wai-Sen wandering about all night, smoking cheroots, clad in few clothes or none, how could that be arranged, *hein?* The pilots accepted old Martel's apologies; they pitched their tents on the beach.

Behind the hangar the village straggled along the bank of Hwang-Chung. In the dry season dust-clouds covered it like fog. In times of rain a man would flounder to his knees in mud. Behind the village gloomed great tangled woods of banyan, bamboo, teak and giant fir. In those woods to which little Sin-Din-Ding had fled lurked everlasting stillness; and the night had horrible eyes; and death crept on padded feet.

Sailing down through the mighty Boca Tigris from Canton, a time-pressed man could take to seaplane from Hongkong when stars dimmed in the sky. In middle morning he would stop at roaring Ho-Ho. Dine at Lao-Hu-Chung. Take tea at Funnychow with Oliver, the Englishman. Spiral down to the waters of Wusung by Shanghai before stars blazed again in the sky. Black Jack, who had killed his man in Yunnan, made that journey once and got away, living to be merrily knifed in Vladivostok.

In a glass-encased, leather-upholstered saloon a passenger lounges, looking down a thousand, two thousand feet at oceans older than life, smoking, yawning, reading, snoring, cursing civilization for stealing romance from life. Farewell to the pirate junks! It is stupid, this sailing along like a silly pigeon.

"Funnychow," explains Oliver, the Englishman. "Well, *I* don't know what the perspiring word means. But the natives eat rats and lizards, and young West says *that* is funny chow. Let's have a drink."

Lao-Hu-Chung may be translated as Old Tiger in the Middle. The history of its naming is lost. Man does not know into whose middle the Old Tiger got, or who got into the Old Tiger's middle. But the Old Tiger may be the floods of Hwang-Chung.

Ho-Ho—a name of laughter. It stands almost square upon the Cancer Tropic. From there the huge whirlwinds gather. Ho-Ho! Hark to the laughter of the old gods of hurricane!

THREE hours West flew north-north-east. Beneath him lilac seas crawling in slow white ranks up the rocky beaches. The seas shallowed with sand-banks, lightened to opal. All about him the unearthly mirage of the upper sky, which makes earth look dim and small. Three hours, and through blue mists below shone Funnychow. From Funnychow's

watch-tower Oliver saw the *Mad Gull* ringing downward. He descended to meet West.

"Sky looks bad," said Oliver. "Barometer's scooting down in a tail-spin. Perspiring bad reports ha' been radioed up all morning from Ho-Ho. Hey, West, what's the matter with you? Man, you look bad."

Oliver was a black Englishman, speaking of Spanish blood. His eyes were deep-set, somewhat sneering. White was sprinkled heavily in his curly, coarse dark hair. Up and down the Fo-Kien coast Oliver, the Englishman, was noted for his hospitality. That may have been because of his squeaky graphophone, his superb library, or his rye, which was ancient and honorable as the house of Windsor, God save us. Of all these Oliver was hospitably liberal.

Liberal also of his daughter, Nancy, the jewel of his hopes, the prettiest girl on all the coasts of the Four Seas save only little Sin-Din-Ding. Oliver wore clean linen and a monocle; he knew his Euripides. Young West had often wondered what mystery had taken Oliver to Funnychow, kept him here, rotting his life away. What dogs of law yapped on his trail in England? With what trust funds had he absconded? What hidden murder done?

The Englishman understood West's curiosity. His smile was grim.

"You seem to have some perspiring trouble on *your* mind, young lad," he told West.

Yellow mechanics, clawing beneath the *Mad Gull* like water-loving monkeys, slipped a truck beneath her keel. A caterpillar tractor, groaning and bucking, dragged the giant seaplane on her truck up the slimy runway.

"No, *sir*," said Oliver. "Lauderdale's not going to take her back to Lao today. Look 't 'at perspiring glassy sea. Not a gasp of wind. Barometer's flirting with twenty-nine. And old Sloan's radioing hurricane from Ho-Ho."

Strapping on his helmet, Torol trotted down to the beach. His anxious eyes were on the brazen sky as he climbed into the ship for Shanghai, the *Rocket*. Mail-bags had already been transferred from the *Mad Gull*.

"Skoal to the Viking!" Torol shouted with a huge flap of his hand. West thought him somewhat stagy.

The *Rocket's* twin motors roared. The mechanics leaped to the beach. Over the flat waters the ship shot, in the grip of a glass sea which held its keel like glue. West and Oliver watched Torol flapping his elevator, trying to tear himself from the sea. For all the world it was like a fat duck bobbing its tail up and down. Torol steered a serpentine course, circled round and crossed the ripples of his own wake. The *Rocket* staggered clear, zooming up, bending on dragging wing to the north. So sharp, so steep that turn that her left aileron cut the sleek surface of the water. Up, heavily climbing, steering north. At a thousand feet squall struck the *Rocket's* wings from behind. The ship lifted like a balloon, tossing dizzily. With the giant fist of the high south wind driving it, the *Rocket* fled towards Shanghai at two miles the minute.

"Quite a perspiring wind up there," said Oliver.

But on the seashore no wind at all was stirring. West wiped streams of sweat from forehead and neck. His back felt like a delta.

"It's perspiring hot," said Oliver. "According to my think, we're due for a man-size typhoon. Lauderdale and Bleibtreu are at my wigwam, looking murder at each other. Stagger on up with me and bask in Nancy's blushes. She'll be glad to see you. We'll have a drink."

Oliver's "wigwam" was a cool bungalow, mostly wide-screened porches, which Nancy Oliver had made habitable and bright. Around it were gardens of roses and nasturtiums, closed in the rear by a wall of sun-dried bricks, a garden seat and a sun-dial. Chrysanthemums were already in hard green bud.

Nancy Oliver greeted West with a shriek. She came running down through the roses to meet him. Her hair was masses of blue-black curls. She had a trick of dropping her eyes. Her laughter made Rudolph West think of little Sin-Din-Ding. But thinking of little Sin-Din-Ding, he quite forgot Nancy Oliver.

Torol and Bleibtreu were jealous mad in love with her; so also all men who had ever stopped at Funnychow. Poor old fat Lauderdale had succumbed to verse making, in which he rimed "Nancy" with "fancy" and "my dear" with "idea." West had room for but one love. His sleepless eyes

did not see Nancy at all, but the arch smile of little Sin-Din-Ding coquetting behind her fan. His smile was pleasanter than Nancy Oliver had known.

The girl held West's hand a long time. Her palm was moist and soft. If she used more pressure than hospitality demanded, West did not notice.

"Back again, Adonis, to play with little me?" Nancy asked in her mocking way. "Blue circles are under your eyes, as though you've been dissipating."

"You're growing yellow as the heathen," West told her. "Too much in the sun, Nancy."

" 'A kiss o' the sun,' Adonis? I ought to call you Apollo. But I thought you were partial to the yellow," Nancy added maliciously. "How is little Ding-Dong-Bell in dirty old Lao? I suppose you've been making desperate love. Your talk has a taste of pidgin."

"Sin-Din-Ding speaks English as well as you or I," West answered, frowning. "And she's as white."

Nancy looked long into his eyes, still pressing his hand.

"It must be quite exciting to be loved by you, Adonis," she said lightly. "You defend your lady-love with such ferocious growls."

She laughed, but her lip trembled.

West did not smile in response. His thoughts were heavy and hot as the impending hurricane. He drew his hand away.

"Having any trouble with the natives in Lao?" Oliver asked, as he led West into his awning-darkened library. "The yellow-bellies in Funnychow are all upset; can't digest their boiled rats; drink my petrol by the gallon. It's whispered the Holy Lord of Yen is somewhere on the Fo-Kien coast."

"Who's he?"

"The great-great-to-infinity grandson of Confutze. Sometime the boys call him Lord of the Hurricane."

West shrugged. In the dim shadows of the library he thought he saw the grinning face of old 'Hwang-Hu-Li. The grinning yellow face of the Yellow Fox on a dissevered head without a neck, floating like a balloon over the bookcases and behind the graphophone! West had been all night without sleep; his flight up from Lao-Hu-Chung had made him drowsy. Fatigue gave him such foul hallucinations. Between closed teeth West hissed an inaudible curse at the grinning, dissevered head of old Hwang-Hu-Li. That was not well, for in his hut in Lao old Yellow Fox lay dead.

Oliver set forth siphon and decanter for the three pilots who were his guests. He mixed the first highballs, making an art of it.

"You look played out, West," he said. "Y' ought to tumble in for an hour or two with Morpheus. Up with the glasses! To Home! Up!"

Oliver drank, wiping his lips.

"Has old Martin Martel—may his grandfather's bones be gnawed by dogs—been spurring you, young lad? Maybe you're in love. It hits a fellow in this perspiring hot —— hole. Lauderdale tells me you've a little Chinese light o' love in Lao."

"Listen!" Rudolph West said heavily, giving Lauderdale an unpleasant glance. "I'm going to marry Sin-Din-Ding!"

"Humph!" muttered Oliver, pulling at his face. "Beg your pardon."

He turned his whisky-and-soda to the light. His deep-set eyes were displeased.

"I suppose you're going to say it's not the thing that's done," West said truculently. "Go ahead and say it. I know what I'm doing."

"Not saying a thing," Oliver denied hastily. "Only——"

He shrugged.

The four men lighted pipes. West's head felt dull and ringing. On Bleibtreu's smooth, ruddy cheeks was a smile which did not belong.

"Nancy's getting married, too," Oliver said, slowly, after long decision.

Rudolph West muttered a polite congratulation.

"I'm thinking of sending her off proper with twenty thousand p'un' for *dot*," said Oliver, looking straight at West. "Y' know, I have a lot of the filthy in the perspiring Shanghai banks I'll never use. Only daughter left. Might as well do the right thing by her."

Young West looked at Oliver's arm, down which ran long scars like old wounds made by fire. He wondered, as he had wondered before, what gave that terrible twisted hardness to Oliver's mouth.

"Nancy's a fine girl," West said politely. "The lucky man who gets her won't need any dowry."

Oliver set down his glass with a bang.

"If *you* were marrying her, young lad," he said, speaking as directly as he could, "I'd throw in little Cynthia's share, and make that forty thousand."

Oliver's voice shook. West recalled hearing a tale that Nancy's sister had been killed by river-pirates many years before. Slowly Oliver ran his fingers down the ragged white scars on his forearm.

"You're not so good a business man as old Yellow Fox, sir," West said with a short laugh. "He tried to sell me little Sin-Din-Ding last night—the dirty dog! Tried to strike a bargain as if she were a basket of fish or a pig. I shut him up short! Who's marrying Nancy?"

Oliver sighed as he filled his glass.

"A queer world," he muttered. "What-o? Oh, Nancy's marrying this blond beast, this hulking Hun, friend Bleibtreu here. Had to give her to him or Torol to keep murder away from Funnychow."

West congratulated Bleibtreu, who appeared a little overwhelmed. Lauderdale sorrowfully bit into a tobacco plug.

"——!" he muttered.

"It's something to be second choice," Bleibtreu said with a sigh, grasping heavily West's hand.

"What rot! Who besides yourself's first choice?"

West and Oliver walked in the garden while Nancy was superintending preparation of luncheon. Of an impulse Oliver gripped West's arm, half-savagely, half-tenderly.

"You know, West, you're too perspiring good looking. A girl could fall in love with you easy enough."

"I only hope little Sin-Din-Ding has," West replied.

AT NOON Funnychow's radio flashed blue sparks. Across the crackling electric warnings broadcasted by Ho-Ho, swifter than the northward swirling typhoon, message from old Martin Martel at Lao-Hu-Chung—

"FW—FW—FW!"

Dot-dot-dash-dot; dot-dash-dash.

"FW—FW—FW! Confidential to Oliver, in charge FW. Hold pilot Rudolph West for murder of fisherman Hwang-Hu-Li. Martel, in charge LG."

Oliver tried to reply, but he could get no answer. For an hour, all through the stifling noon, old Martel broadcasted his savage warnings, to rouse the coast from Hwang-Ho to the Si—

"All stations—all stations—all stations! Hold pilot Rudolph West at all costs. Has murdered Hwang-Hu-Li!"

ALL morning old Martin Martel's yellow boys had searched for little Sin-Din-Ding in the pine-forests and along the caving banks of rising Hwang-Chung-Kiang. She was weak and little; the woods were terrible and old. They followed trail into the bamboo-swamps where the python has his lair, along winding streams where alligators dozed with wakeful eyes through centuries, through tangled thickets where the monkey people screamed.

In a giant square-bamboo copse she lay asleep, or seemed to be asleep. Close beside the bamboos flowed the brook Ki-Si, which empties into muddy Hwang-Chung. The woods were tossed with wind. The bamboos groaned. A giant gray rat, carrying a rat-cub in her teeth, fled up the shores of Ki-Si. High aloft a troupe of white-faced monkeys looped their tails about swaying limbs; screaming, they fled away from the lost maiden; fled from that scaly red-and-umber horror which crawled toward the square-bamboo copse. The python which sleeps by Ki-Si banks had its dull eyes on little Sin-Din-Ding. Death shimmered in its weaving folds.

The forests trembled and groaned for fear of hurricane. Once Li, the cat with tufted ears, screamed. After that one note, long silence.

McCarthy led the chattering, timid coolies who found little Sin-Din-Ding. She made no struggle when they broke through the bamboos and lifted her out. Jubilantly McCarthy cocked his derby over his eye. The yellow men carried little Sin-Din-Ding, lifting her not too tenderly over the roots and stones of the forest floor.

"Where is West?" she whimpered. "I want West!"

McCarthy paid her no attention. He watched over her tenderly, tenderly as a drunkard watches a fine, fat bottle of stone-cured Scotch.

Old Martin Martel came running toward McCarthy at the outskirts of Lao-Hu-Chung. McCarthy shoved his derby back on his head, grimaced and spat. Old Martel tried to take little Sin-Din-Ding from the bearers, but his arms were weak,

and little Sin-Din-Ding's struggles set him to coughing.

"So you found her for me, Mac!"

"For you!" McCarthy grunted.

Martel looked furiously at the pilot. His red old eyes foamed. In her struggling Sin-Din-Ding's blue cotton gown had dislodged from her shoulder. Though the skin of her face and neck had been burned deep brown, Hakka brown, by many fierce tropic suns, the shoulder flesh disclosed was milk-white, veined with faint tracery of blue.

"Keep away, you unrighteous old man!" little Sin-Din-Ding cried quite disrespectfully, and as no proper young girl should ever cry to her reverend elders.

"White!" said old Martel, with a curious gasping noise. "All white!"

He ducked his lips toward the girl's shoulder. McCarthy brought him up short. McCarthy's thick lips wore an unpleasant smile.

"Don't you eat me with your lips!" little Sin-Din-Ding sobbed. "You are a vile old dragon, and I don't care if you are old. Wait till West comes back from Funny-chow. I'll tell him. He'll spit at you. He'll pull your nose. Take your hands away from me, white-faced monkey!"

"The girl lacks breeding," said Lo-Li-L'ai, the coolie, to Ying-Sam-Wung, the coolie.

"She should have her tongue cut out," said Ying-Sam-Wung. "Thus would she learn to reflect on the reverence of God."

"Girls these days are not what they were," whined Lo-Li-L'ai. "What is the world coming to?"

McCarthy still held to old Martel's arm.

"Let's come to an understanding, Mr. Martel!"

"What business have you butting in on my affairs?" Martel yelled, furiously beside himself.

He squeaked like a rat with rage. His fist shot in a feeble blow at McCarthy's chest. McCarthy, the pugilist, knocked the blow aside like a straw. Old Martel's arm was bruised. He wrung it, rubbed it, swung it back and forth.

McCarthy only laughed. He pushed his derby back behind his ears. Leaning over, he tapped old Martel on the shoulder. He whispered—

"Listen——"

Why did old Martin Martel's shoulders wilt? Why did he wipe and wipe his dusty lips? Why did those spasms twitch across his face? His eyes grew yellow, as if with suffusion of bile.

"Listen, Mr. Martel! Wai-Sen told me——"

"The liar!"

"Wai-Sen told me that you went to Hwang-Hu-Li's hut this morning, after West had gone, to buy Sin-Din-Ding——"

"The liar! I'm sick of her yellow face! I'll cut her throat!"

"Throat-cutting has been done, Martel," McCarthy said steadily.

"Mac! Mac! We're friends, boy!"

McCarthy chose a place and spat. He watched the dust for a long time, saying nothing. Secretly Ying-Sam-Wung pinched the arms of little Sin-Din-Ding, who replied by irreverently kicking him on the shins, most sacred articles with Ying-Sam-Wung.

"We'll say nothing," McCarthy decided at last. "We're not kids nor missionaries, Mr. Martel. What's wrong with killing a chink? Personally, I'd like to see you fasten it on West—the sneering, stuck-up pussy-face! I'd like to bust his jaw to show him where he gets off. We'll play fair, Mr. Martel."

"Yes. Yes, indeed, Mac."

"I like this kid Sin-Din-Ding. Like her better now I know she's white. Always had a sneaking idea of it. I'd 'a' given old Hwang-Hu-Li fifty dollars for her any day. Now we might——"

"I'll give you fifty dollars to stay away, Mac," old Martel squeaked.

McCarthy slowly shook his head.

"We'll roll the bones for her," he said.

"All right, all right!" cried Martel, all alacrity. "You'll stick fair and square by the throw, Mac?"

"I'm a gambling man."

With trembling fingers old Martel pulled red-eyed dice from his vest pocket. On their haunches old Martel and McCarthy squatted, their knuckles resting in the dust. Lo-Li-L'ai and Ying-Sam-Wung bent over, their gambling blood on fire. Little Sin-Din-Ding was terrified and weeping. In the white, hot dust of Lao-Hu-Chung's river-road those two men cast dice to see which should own Sin-Din-Ding's body.

A rattle and click! A snap of the fingers!

"Stand clear! Let 'em roll!"

An oath to God! Burning pulses; dusty eyes; hearts which choked throats! In the

dust the dice of McCarthy's last throw ceased to roll, staring up with two red python eyes. Snake eyes!

"I win!" old Martin Martel whispered, strangling his laughter.

And win he should, since his dice were loaded.

Martel's men led the little Sin-Din-Ding to his hot, iron-roofed dwelling. Martel shut her in a closet without window, locking the door and giving the key to Pravata.

"See you watch her better than you do my wine, woman-with-the-disgusting-countenance! As for you, Wai-Sen, you open your black teeth too much!"

Sin-Din-Ding screeched and kicked against the closet door.

"You'd better stop your howling!" old Martel shouted. "You're mighty lucky to have such a fine white man as me look at you with agreeable eyes. Pravata will give you something to eat when you get sensible, and feed you wine to make your heart happy, and dress you in silk pajamas like a bride."

Little Sin-Din-Ding flung her whole body against the door. She was like a spitting cat. Old Martel jumped back, for he was afraid she might burst through. He rubbed a shoulder in which burned deep crimson marks of little Sin-Din-Ding's teeth. Would you think a child with such demure eyes, so respectably reared by old Hwang-Hu-Li, could have such devils in her, *hein?*

Old Martel kicked Pravata.

"Up, drunken one! Make her pretty for your reverend patron, me, sacred Martin Martel. As for you, Wai-Sen, O daughter of a parrot! You open your mouth too much. We know means to close it!"

Wai-Sen only whimpered, clutching the ankles of old Martin Martel. But Pravata was of the Siamese, who call themselves white; and she had a white girl's distaste for being kicked. Her eyes were more poisonous than pink Oyen absinthe.

Lo-Li-L'ai and Ying-Sam-Wung stretched Wai-Sen out on the floor, face down, her hands and feet stretched and tied. Wearily, stoically, with the monotony of a pendulum, the arm of Lo-Li-L'ai fell, striking the thighs of Wai-Sen with a split bamboo rod. Wai-Sen writhed, but she did not scream. The two edges of the split bamboo made cuts sharp as those of a double knife. Ying-Sam-Wung sat on his heels and watched, ready to take the rod when Lo-Li-L'ai's arms grew tired.

Old Martin Martel was down along the shore, watching the great typhoon come northward up the coast.

IN FUNNYCHOW luncheon was served on one of Oliver's wide verandas. Oliver drank a great deal of whisky to keep cool; but the more he drank, the hotter he grew. Lauderdale was gloomy; he ate with his elbows on the table, his mouth bent to his plate, brushing away flies, which had crept in through the screens, melting in his own fat. Bleibtreu was strangely repressed and joyless for a man who had been promised Nancy Oliver's hand. He directed furtive glances at the girl, whose eyes were red. Once he tried to take her hand bneath the table, but she drew away. Ach! Better to be second choice than no choice at all.

Nancy talked too much. She treated West with an open disdain for which he could not account. Quarrelsomely she flung his food sliding across the table, with a "take that" gesture.

Looking down at a plate of yellow rice, West trembled. In its midst he had vision of the grinning, evil countenance of Hwang-Hu-Li.

"Four hundred dollars for the girl," old Yellow Fox was whining. "If not, I sell her to Martel for more."

West's knife shook in his fist. Too much flying. It was getting on his nerves, as it did on any man's. Some day, perhaps, he would be air-crazy, like cracked old Sloan at Ho-Ho. An evil vision, nothing more. The plate was nothing more than a plate of yellow rice. But—T'ien! He might have stuck his knife into that grinning face!

In the shadows of the porch West thought now he saw the demure face of little Sin-Din-Ding, shyly smiling at him as she waved her purple fan. Nancy thought the smile on West's lips was for her and she smiled back, hoping desperately. But West's eyes were vacant.

"Think the hangar 'll weather the hurricane?" Lauderdale was mumbling, his mouth full of food.

Clear and ringing, sounding more real than the chatter of talk, the clatter of cutlery, or the soft shuffle-shuffle of a boy who moved about the table, West heard the voice of little Sin-Din-Ding. Over two hundred miles of rippleless dead ocean! Above the low muttering of the wind!

"O West! O West!"

He heard a song, his own song—

> "High on the breast of T'ien I thought
> I saw your face——"

"Wait a minute!" he shouted, kicking back his chair.

"It's got him!" whispered Bleibtreu, while Nancy screamed.

West shook off the arm of Oliver, which was wrapped about his shoulder.

"I'm all right, man! I'm all right. But I've got to get back to Lao! I've got to go!"

The Englishman followed him off the porch and down the road to the ocean. He waved a white napkin. West ran. Oliver did not overtake him till they had come to the runway on the beach. West was roaring at the mechanics to launch the *Mad Gull*.

"Wait, boy! I won't let you go!"

"I can beat out the hurricane," West growled. "I've got to go!"

"Not to Lao! You're crazy, West!"

"I know—I know— If old Martel has dared——"

"West, they're waiting for you in Lao! They'll put chains on you!"

"What's that?" West stuttered, sensing something ominous in Oliver's tones. "I can fly all right. Typhoon won't strike for hours yet. Don't try to stop me, sir!"

Oliver spoke evenly.

"I know about Hwang-Hu-Li, young lad."

"What's that? What's that?"

"Martel radioed. He wants you arrested and held for him. Hwang-Hu-Li was killed some time last night."

"Great ——! I saw him alive not twelve hours ago! Was in his hut with him. Hwang-Hu-Li! Killed! What will happen to little Sin-Din-Ding? You've got the name wrong. Who could have killed him?"

Oliver's grasp tightened.

"That's what people will ask *you*, boy."

The hot brass sky looked dim to young West. He laid his hand on Oliver's shoulder, needing support. Dreamwise he watched frightened gulls winging for shore; watched yellow men in the hangar wiping down the wings of the *Mad Gull* and lashing her fast against the coming hurricane; watched the still sea begin to froth; watched a giant Chinaman in purple silk striding sedately down the runway toward him. Something disastrous was portended in the presence of that strange yellow giant. The wind began to stir.

"You don't think I did it, Mr. Oliver!"

"I'm not asking, young lad. I'll see you get clear to Shanghai and have a square chance before the consul. But don't go back to Lao!"

"I never killed him, Oliver! That dirty dog——"

"Careful, boy!"

"That dirty dog tried to sell me little Sin-Din-Ding. I choked his words in his gullet——"

"West! West!"

"He'd have sold that child to Martel, McCarthy, or me, whichever one shelled out the most money. I swore I'd kill him if he did. But I never hurt the old man."

"It was his privilege to sell her," said Oliver. "She was his."

"That pirate stole her!" roared West, pushing Oliver away from him. "Out with the *Mad Gull*, fellows! He stole her, I say. I swear little Sin-Din-Ding is white!"

Heat waves danced on the still ocean. A slow, torrid wind began to steam. Trees swayed. White sand-clouds blew along the beach. The seaplane runway creaked with the burden of the sea. A loose door in the hangar slapped shut gustily.

The strange giant Chinaman had come up to West and Oliver. He waved a blue silk fan. His cheeks slowly moved as he chewed gum; his rotating jowls were smooth and dimpled as a baby's. His eyes were mild. But his slowly moving blue fan seemed to stir blue wind upon the sea.

A golden turtle was woven on the breast of his purple silken gown. A giant turtle, its serpent neck stretching, its claws spread. That might have been the turtle on whose back the great universe rests; or the turtle from one whose unfertilized egg T'ien, the old God, was born on a May morning.

"Fly ship lea' go sail Hongkong?" the giant asked, waving his fan, looking blandly down at Oliver and West.

Such a great Chinaman had never been before. West was uneasy. But Oliver paid no attention. The Englishman's strained gaze had fastened on Rudolph West. The young pilot was frightened to see Oliver's deep-black eyes dilate, Oliver's bony hands clench as for a blow. He wondered if Oliver himself had gone mad.

"Fly ship take me Hongkong?" the giant Chinaman asked insinuatingly.

Oliver slowly drew back his sleeves, laying bare those terrible white scars of old burns.

"The pirates did that," he said, in a hoarse voice which struggled to rise above a whisper, "when they stole my baby girl from me. A white girl! How old, West? For God's sake, don't stammer like a monkey! How old?"

"Sin-Din-Ding's about fifteen," West said.

'Sin-Din-Ding," Oliver repeated, in a voice nearly choking. "Sin-Din-Ding— Why, that's *Cynthia, darling!*" Oliver screamed. "Out, out, out with the *Mad Gull!*"

"Sin-Din-Ding does look like Nancy," West muttered, feeling his own heart in tumult. "I'd never thought——"

"Fourteen years!" gasped Oliver, staggering toward the hangar. "From Harbin to Hanoi— Up and down the coast— My life spent in this hole of hell— Out, out with the *Mad Gull*, you stupid apes! To Lao, Lao, Lao!"

Oliver was running toward the hangar with waving fists.

"Down to the water with her. Move, you turtles! Are you stone?"

THE giant Chinaman closed his fan, and the wind grew still. The eyes of the golden turtle on his breast seemed to blink and wink.

"Take me Hongkong?" he whispered benignly.

"We go fly-fly Lao-Hu-Chung," West told him.

"I come along. Lookee! Soon, soon come hullicane!"

Twenty coolies panted as they pushed and hauled the great *Mad Gull* from her hangar. The seaplane's two-wheeled truck slipped over the incline of the runway, trundling with a noise of thunder. Wide, glistening wings quivered like an eagle's wings for hunger of the air. The coolies fought with writhing muscles to hold her back as she swept down the runway to the water.

With a rush the *Mad Gull* slid for the sea as the coolies released their arms. Her keel struck with giant splashing. Her truck floated clear.

"Off! Shove off, you lunatic!" Oliver shouted to West. "That's my baby girl there in Lao! Use your wits! Off! What's the matter with those yellow devils?"

A queer sight. The giant Chinaman stood placidly waving his fan. A wind had begun to rise. All the yellow men on the runway and beach were fallen flat to earth. One crawled along on his belly, taking the hem of the giant's purple gown, touching it to his forehead and breast.

"The Holy Lord of Yen! Lord of the Hurricane!"

The giant bowed, looking sheepishly at West.

"Vel' nice," he muttered. "Vel' nice."

He closed his fan with a snap. The wind grew still.

In an endless chain from runway to top of the *Mad Gull* a line of yellow men passed up petrol cans to be poured into the seaplane's tanks. Two hundred gallons; the gage marked full to overflowing. One fellow came running down with the mail Bleibtreu had brought from Shanghai, due to go farther yet to Hongkong. The *Mad Gull* rocked on the bosom of a sea which was beginning to rise in oily swells.

"For God's sake, West, do you think we've got a life to spend here?"

"Sin-Din-Ding's mine as much as his," West thought, with queer arising jealousy.

Wind blew in hot puffs. The ocean was troubled by refrangent ripples. High above gulls tossed upside down, blown north by terrific blasts. But on the surface of the sea, by the token of the white lines of spume, what wind there blew, blew south.

A mile offshore dolphins were leaping, one after one in steady line. Their glistening black bodies curled in the hazy sun. A drop of rain splattered on the runway, drying almost before it had struck. From southward swam a black mass of clouds, blotting out the sun, making the whole world shadow.

"Hullicane come soon," said the giant, waving his fan solemnly.

Out from the runway the *Mad Gull* swam. Looking back from the pilot's seat, West saw the giant Chinaman had taken seat in the saloon with Oliver. Too late now to turn back. The sea was gathering speed beneath.

"Who are you?" Oliver shouted, cupping his hands to roar above the stammering of the *Mad Gull's* twin engines. "You oughtn't to come with us. We may be wrecked!"

The Chinaman waved his fan, answering nothing.

The *Mad Gull* swam. She ran. She raced. No glassy sea now such as had held Torol down. Upon her step the great seaplane ran, the small north wind behind her, joyously glad and exultant for the gift of wings. Like a pigeon she was off, beating steadily south.

A thousand feet above howling clouds fled north. But close to the churning sea the small wind was contrary.

"Low! Low!" West told himself, half-standing in his seat to press down the *Mad Gull's* wheel. He watched the altimeter registering constantly two hundred feet, not for his life letting the ship fly higher.

Above the sand-banks, the opal seas, cutting across peninsulas rocky-thorned, heading south-south-westward to Lao-Hu-Chung with the typhoon gathering head above! Clouds skeltered thick as wool. Loudly the *Mad Gull's* engines roared defiance to the great typhoon. Wind burned West's forehead above his goggles. Sharp needles of rain cut his skin with glass-sharp lances. He closed the mica window before his eyes.

The vision of the face of grinning old Hwang-Hu-Li no longer troubled West. The soul of that pirate fisher had lingered its twelve hours on earth, and was passed now to the islands of forgetting.

It was the face of little Sin-Din-Ding Rudolph West saw. He had the notion he was holding the *Mad Gull's* bow steadily toward the wistful eyes of little Sin-Din-Ding, which dissolved in mist and rain. And when the mist and rain were all about him, and even his airman's birdlike sense betrayed him, and no help was to be found in landmark, seamark, or instrument board, the eyes of little Sin-Din-Ding held him to the true course, kept him safe from harm.

Has a true man ever flown the air and not known the time when a woman's eyes, seen in the cloud, the mist, the rain, led him onward like beacon light, keeping him safe from harm? And Buster Lard, who was a false man—a woman's eyes betrayed him!

But that's another story.

'Sin-Din-Ding!" stammered the loud singing engines, tuned to a monotone. "Sin-Din-Ding!" droning down the wind, till the sound was one continuous song.

And the *Mad Gull* tore through raveled cloud. And for a while the way was clear again.

Out of Ho-Ho where the whirlwinds gather—out of Cancer Tropic by the sea—sweeping with cyclone Formosa Strait, drowning the coasts in cataclysm, sucking waterspouts from sea to sky as ladders up which devils clambered, rolling with screaming laughter, drumming its angry music on the drumheads of the heavens, rushed the typhoon, the hurricane!

NOW in Lao-Hu-Chung the dust-clouds drift and rain. Now the sea turns like a snake nest, coiling and weaving and writhing. Now wind whistles through the steel masts of the watch-tower. Now the hangar's doors, fast battened shut, their steel strength locked, quiver like the walls of a canvas tent. Now the forests talk and toss and twist. Now the muddy breast of Hwang-Chung lifts in little stalagmites, as twisting breezes pinch it to knots. Now the wind goes by with a dolorous cry.

Now the hurricane, drowning the ocean, rushes up from Ho-Ho where the whirlwinds gather!

"LG—LG—LG!" Mad Sloan at the key! Mad Sloan in old Ho-Ho.

"FW—FW—FW!" Old Sloan, whom the air has made mad, hammering out blue lightning through the hurricane!

"All stations—all stations—all stations! Anderson heading north. Watch out for him!"

Old Martel didn't have time to think of pink Oyen absinthe or even of little Sin-Din-Ding, locked up in a closet of his house, during that terrible afternoon. White men and yellow rushed about crazily, throwing their arms in front of them, shouting, tying silly knots in silly rope. The hangar's hurricane doors were lashed fast, but still they creaked and crinkled. Huge iron cables were hauled taut over the iron-roofed manager's house, and bent fast about great trunks and stumps.

In late afternoon Anderson came tearing out of the solid blackness to the south, his ship, the *Lightning Flower*, staggering in the grip of angry tornadoes high above. Out of Ho-Ho, Anderson, bearing warning of the hurricane!

One look at the gurly sea, and he did not try to stop. Swift as the lightning the *Lightning Flower* passed overhead. Martel

could see Anderson's hand waving grim farewell. White-streaked seas, already beginning to stir in mountains, leaped up to tear his thunderous keel. But he was high. Two thousand feet he flew.

Steadily, steadily, fists frozen to his wheel, gaze hard ahead, he held the *Lightning Flower* north, desperately striving to make Funnychow, to beat out the thwarted hurricane. His ship droned and died away. After that in Lao-Hu-Chung seemed to brood a great silence.

Fifty miles north of Lao the *Mad Gull* met the *Lightning Flower*, which swooped two thousand feet to speak the *Gull*. West saw the lips of Anderson, hard as stone, his eyes like a dead man's eyes. He had seen the hurricane which gathers in Ho-Ho. Anderson pushed his palm with repeated gesture ahead of him. He opened his mouth in a cry inaudible:

"Turn back! Turn back, you fool!"

The *Lightning Flower* was gone upon the winds. A wave of the hand. A jeer on West's lips. Ships which pass in the air!

Hark to the dolor of Hwang-Chung-Kiang, which froths against its banks! It weeps with the treachery of the crocodile. Its waters are deep brown as burned oak. Above its roiling torrents fat carp, those stolid stupid fishes, leap in flashing rainbow arcs. Great logs whirl round and round upon those greasy, twisting, eddying waters, poured downward to the sea. The roof of a house swirls down, on it sitting a Chinaman smoking a pipe, solemnly watching the Fates!

Inch by inch old Hwang-Chung rises at its banks. Foot by foot old Hwang-Chung gnaws its banks away. The flood rises; the flood widens. The flood looks at Lao's huts with ravenous eyes.

Flood through the hilly passes far in the west country. Flood boiling over the meadows north and west. Flood tearing down on the silt-lands. Mighty Hwang-Chung, the Yellow, is towering with flood again!

Out of the south on the wings of lightning—

"All stations—all stations—all stations! Typhoon to make you sit up and think. LG—LG—LG! Are you with us, brother LG? Typhoon!"

Dash; dash-dot-dash-dash; dot-dash-dash-dot; dot-dot-dot-dot; dash-dash-dash; dash-dash-dash; dash-dot! Typhoon! Lightning cutting the wind with dazzling knives! Lightning splitting the whirlwind! Roar of a man's swift laughter! Mad Sloan at the key in old Ho-Ho!

"Are you with us, brother LG? Watch-tower dancing like man with wooden leg. Can't sit still and think. Has it hit you, LG? What a blue Monday. Do you know how to swim, LG? Anderson left home without his rubbers, and it looks like rain. Page him, LG. Page him in the hurricane, and tell him to come back and get his rubbers. LG—LG—LG! Take a drink for me, Martel, for old mad Sloan. Some wind. Wow! Wow! Get this? Watch-tower giving way. Large section of ocean climbing over hangar. Feel like a ——

"FW—FW—FW! Sloan at the key, FW. Old mad Sloan. Taking a dive into the deep. My love to Nancy Oliver. Some one give my love to Nancy——"

Martel and McCarthy took turns at the Lao key, working it furiously. "HO—HO—HO! LG calling. HO—HO—HO!"

But all answer which came back was the wind which blew through Lao-Hu-Chung, loud with drunken laughter! "Ho-Ho! Ho-Ho! Ho-Ho!"

WIND blasted clear the rain. Three hundred feet below West saw Lao's hangar beside the frothy sea. Hwang-Chung was a torrent. The watch-tower swayed. Martel's house was lifting as if to take wings and fly away. Beating around in the rocking air, West swooped to the sea with the wind to take the steep waves on their backs.

The *Mad Gull* bounded in hundred-foot jumps, leaping from comber to comber. The wheel in West's hands was jerked with giant strength. He held it steadily. Pounding waters beat the hull of the seaplane with crushing blows. Before the *Gull* had settled from her step, West opened the throttles, swirling and bouncing over the shallower inshore waves toward the runway. The *Mad Gull* beached with a ripping sound, running half a rod up the planks.

In the saloon the giant Chinaman had been placidly fanning himself. A pleasant yellow smile was on his face. He was not afraid.

"Vel' fine," he murmured graciously.

He closed his fan. The winds died down. They were as beasts crouching in their lairs. It was the lull before the overwhelming destruction.

Oliver was first out.

"Where's Cynthia?" he bellowed, seizing old Martin Martel as if he would choke him.

"Oliver! Oliver! What's the matter with you? So you've brought West in, *hein?* Lucky, lucky you got here safe! Grab hold of West, McCarthy, Lo-Li-L'ai, Ying-Sam-Wung! Don't let him get away!"

The giant yellow Chinaman moved grandly down the runway, tucking his fan in his sleeve.

"Vel' nice, vel' nice," he kept muttering, as he peered at the water-tower, the hangar and the sky. He seemed loath to witness a white man's quarrel, as any decent Chinaman might be.

Shaking coolies, out of their wits with terror, recognized him. They fell at his feet.

"Have pity on us, Confutze's son, Holy Lord of Yen!"

With a placid smile the Chinaman lifted them up. Lo-Li-L'ai and Ying-Sam-Wung followed him from the sea.

West shook off Martel's clutches.

"Where's Sin-Din-Ding, Martel? Don't lie to me! I'll murder you!"

Two to two of them beside the stormy sea. The wind had lulled, but the sky was black. Old Martel drew a knife from the sleeve of his khaki coat, but Oliver sent him sprawling. McCarthy, the pugilist, hung back. It was not a fight which threatened, but death!

"Where's this girl known as Sin-Din-Ding?"

"Don't hurt me, Oliver!" Martel screeched. "You daren't hurt me!"

"I'll kill you with my hands! Where is she?"

"Taking part with a murderer, are you, Oliver? This West is prisoner of the law! I'll turn him over to the Chih-Fu. You too, if you help him."

Oliver growled. White men know no law of the Chih-Fu. He knelt beside old Martel, who had not yet regained his feet. Oliver's bony hands dug into the cords of Martel's neck.

"No second to lose, Martel! Sin-Din-Ding's my daughter. Tell me where she is before I choke you!"

"At Ho-Ho!" old Martel gasped, thinking Oliver was insane. "At Ho-Ho! Hunt her there, if you want her."

"You lie," Rudolph West said coldly.

"He's telling the truth," stated McCarthy.

But little Sin-Din-Ding was still locked in the windowless closet of old Martin Martel, beating herself bloody against a door which would not open.

"Shove off!" Oliver shouted. "Off with the *Mad Gull* again. Afraid, West? I'll take her out alone! To Ho-Ho!"

West allowed his intuition to be overborne. He looked at the stormy sea; from it to the stormy sky. His lips were set. He shook his head. Wreck within the sky! Drowning in the sea! But if little Sin-Din-Ding was there, there he would be also.

They strained and slipped to push the *Mad Gull's* five-ton weight back down the runway up which she had skimmed. Ten men of them, white and yellow, tearing their sinews at the heavy boat. The *Mad Gull* slipped on the mossy planks. She crept down toward the scummy froth of the waves.

The giant Chinaman came placidly down the runway again, strutting a trifle, his chest puffing. The golden turtle on his gown seemed a thing alive. Rain poured from black clouds. Men shivered. They heard the shout of old Hwang-Chung as he burst his banks and howled down in flood!

A yellow mechanic started the two great motors. Oliver beat West's back with his fists to urge him to speed.

"Lea' vel' fine mail-bag?" the Chinaman asked, pointing with his fan to the runway.

"You've left the mail, West," shouted old Martel, with secret sneers. "Take it to Ho-Ho."

He cupped his hands to a megaphone.

"Take it to Ho-Ho, if you're going."

West muttered an oath. He moved the *Mad Gull's* wheel, testing the controls. The seaplane's tail flipped up and down in old Martel's face.

Ying-Sam-Wung and Lo-Li-L'ai lifted the single rain-drenched mail-bag which lay on the runway. It was heavy. They groaned and grunted. West would have got away, but the *Mad Gull's* keel was still a yard from water.

"Vel' fine mail-bag," said the yellow giant, tapping his fan on West's shoulder for reproof.

He spoke some words to the two struggling coolies in a dialect none of the white men knew. They smiled as they stowed the bag aboard the *Gull*. Bowing, they pressed his hands to their foreheads.

"Confutze's son, Lord of the Hurricane!"

"Who are you?" Oliver shouted to the giant. "You're holding us up, yellow boy. Off with you, West. Give it the gun! Wide out! Take the breast of that comber!"

"I know what I'm doing," West growled.

The *Mad Gull* strained, both her engines opened wide. She slid down the last feet and water was beneath her.

"Where to with the mail?" Oliver shouted, leaning out the saloon door. "No tag on it, Martel. Do you hear me, Martel? Where's this mail going to?"

"Mail for the hurricane!" McCarthy mocked, waving his hand.

The *Mad Gull* leaped on surges, fell with a crash into comber-valleys. Her propellers screamed as they sang through water; sixteen hundred revolutions the minute those heavy blades sang.

Looking back, Oliver saw McCarthy still waving his jeering adieu from the runway. He had his derby beneath his arm to protect it from the rain. Old Martel was shaking with silent laughter.

The watch-tower was bending like a reed. Old Hwang-Chung foamed over his banks. A dozen coolies knelt, looking out after the Lord of the Hurricane. The rain came; it was black as night. All sight of Lao-Hu-Chung was lost.

NOW comes the hurricane in its fury! The Holy Lord of Yen had unfolded his wind-blue fan. Heavily he flutters it against the golden turtle on his breast!

Giant waves above her, the *Mad Gull* beats to sea. Slowly, like a wounded snake. Heavily, like a clipped bird. Staggeringly, like a ship which is marked for death by the cold maidens of the sea.

Over the hull, over the topmost wings, the great seas flailed. Water crept in, drenching West with the sticky wetness of ocean water. His lips were salt. His wind-burned forehead was like raw flesh.

Would the *Mad Gull* ever rise? Heavily she labored, one wing and then the other dragging deep. Her propellers screamed as they beat through the cruel sea. Blue flames came from her engine pipe-exhausts. Down, down with surges leaping over her!

Before him Rudolph West saw the dear eyes of little Sin-Din-Ding. He lifted up his head. He bit his lips and tasted blood.

"I must get out of this," he said to himself.

Southeast into the fury of the storm. He could not see. The *Mad Gull* climbed a giant wave. On its crest she tarried. Down into its depths with a crash which rent her every seam.

But she is on her step! She bounces over the crests now! She takes huge leaps now! She is clear! She is free! She is staggering in the high, clean air, her mighty wings outspread.

West looked behind him at a shout which sounded above the engine roar. Half of the bottom planking of the ship had been torn clear away by the insatiable ocean. Oliver and the Lord of Yen could look down clear three hundred feet at the mad ocean floor.

The Lord of the Hurricane waves his fan. Out of Ho-Ho, out of the Cancer Tropic, the whirlwind has come down!

With pale moon eyes the Lord of the Hurricane looks about him. The white-ribbed sea arises with a scream, lifting cliffs of water a hundred feet. From horizon in the north to horizon in the south lies a blanket of deluging rain. Wisps of cloud trailing and raveling in the tearing propeller blades. Nothing to be seen.

Up from the wastes impassable where the wind has birth, out of drowned Ho-Ho, has come the tornado of tornadoes, the giant typhoon, the hurricane!

Through vacuums of space the *Mad Gull* drops. Up like a shot she leaps a thousand feet! West watches the altimeter needle shaking like a rapid pulse; two thousand; twenty-five hundred; fifteen hundred feet above the sea invisible. Down for a thousand feet into the everlasting void.

The universe was nothing. Day and sun and gravity were nothing. Wing over, it may be upside down, the *Mad Gull* catapulted, dropped, spun, whirled through chaos without foundation.

In the benign eyes of the giant Chinaman was no shadow of fear. He continued to fan himself; he continued to chew gum.

"Vel' nice. Vel' nice," his inaudible lips were murmuring.

To the engineer his train; to the captain his ship; to the pilot his wings. They are hired to handle them; let them do it. Why should we be afraid?

West smiled even in his grimness. He alone was conscious of impending fate. When the hurricane should beat them down —when a blow should crash them to the

depths of ocean—when his blind hands should steer the *Mad Gull* straight at those toppling waters below, Oliver and the Chinaman would be astonished! They would not believe it possible; not possible they should die.

The rain-clouds cleared away. Now nothing could be seen but the high whirling winds which gripped them in fury, but sight of anything was comforting. The *Mad Gull* had staggered through the rain. Six thousand feet above the sea she ran along. The rain-clouds tossed below her.

Counter-clockwise, heading northeast, following immutable laws which bind the universe and God in high heaven, the hurricane whirled to sea. West looked behind him, for he heard thunder clap hard at the *Mad Gull's* tail.

The Holy Lord of Yen had closed his fan with a clap. With a gesture like command he pointed the fan below.

The rain-clouds parted. They broke and headed for the open sea. Away from Lao-Hu-Chung, away from the Fo-Kien coast, the giant whirlwind fled for the outer ocean!

With lightning flash, with noise of thunder, the storm-clouds broke below. In the north shone rainbow, and the sun came down on straight latticed ladders through the purple mist. Still unsatiated, breaking all living things within its path, the hurricane howled far northeast toward the island of Liu-Kiu and the southmost coast of Japan. The Lord of Yen pointed his fan after it, laughing childishly.

West did not dare to smile. Death had sat lightly by his side.

He swept down through the dwindling clouds. Though he had kept the *Gull's* bow steadily pointed south, he was not surprized to find the hurricane had swept him far to north of Lao-Hu-Chung.

Swiftly he beat along the coast, looking for the village, till he had gone miles beyond where it should lie. And back again, but still he did not see it. The tidal waves still clambered on the shore. What was this frothy torrent wide as a bay where once had rolled muddy Hwang-Chung?

The *Mad Gull* swept low, singing the song of the dead. Less than a hundred feet above those murky tides she fled and circled and swung. Where had billowed muddy Hwang-Chung, drowsing deep within his treacherous pools, hiding the weedy carp, fringed by bamboo grass, now roared a swelling torrent. On the brown bosom of the flood rolled roofs of huts, wrecked river-junks, great forests of fir-trees large as sequoias wrenched upward by their roots. Old Hwang-Chung had risen to flood more fierce than man had known.

West was so low he could see even one red fir on whose earth-matted roots a python and a gray pig clung trembling together, crouching close for fear, united in the confraternity of living things which see death near.

No trace there of the hut of old Hwang-Hu-Li, fisher of tiger-fish by the streams Hwang-Chung, nor of his nets, nor his household gods. No trace to mark all Lao. A town buried without tombstone, drowned deep within the flood!

Yet for an instant between overtoppling surges the watch-tower was exposed. West thought—though the vision was so brief he could not be sure—that he saw old Martel and McCarthy sitting in it, McCarthy with his derby in his hands, old Martel with a dead drowned woman on his knee.

Waves swept the steel-roofed hangar. They covered that highest tower again. It was one with Atlantis, with the drowned cities of the sea.

Vainly the singing *Mad Gull* swept over and back, sawing the air into triangles. She could not settle in those upending tides, which would have sucked her down like a leaf. Young West flew low as he dared, till froth of the surge leaped up and curled over the *Gull's* wings.

He turned round to look at Oliver and the Holy Lord of Yen. The giant Chinaman was swiftly unfastening that mail-bag taken on at Lao. Mail for the hurricane, McCarthy had said.

"Lookee!" the Chinaman laughed, forming words which could not be heard above the engines' roaring. "Lookee. Find 'er in house of Ma'tin Ma'tel."

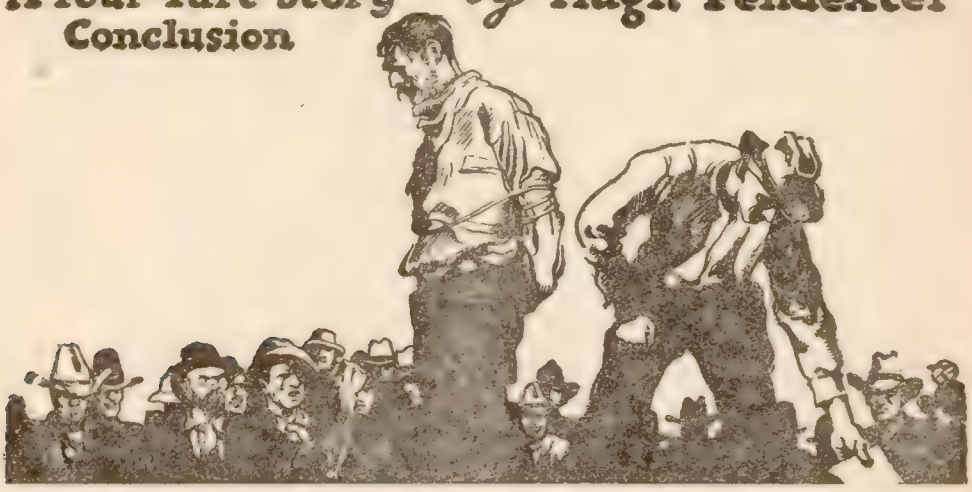
Out of the sack crept little Sin-Din-Ding, rubbing her eyes. She did not know why Oliver seized on her, pressed her to him till her heart hurt her breast. But she did not mind. He was an old man, and a young girl must be respectful to the reverend old. Timidly she smiled at West.

West turned the *Mad Gull* toward Funnychow, down the coast where clouds still spoke in thunder.

TAMELESS DAYS

A Four-Part Story — Conclusion

by Hugh Pendexter



Author of "War Wampum," "Over the Rim of the Ridge," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

THE Contents, that is, Milot Content, his fifteen-year-old daughter, Josette, and his son, Beach—were preparing to leave their farm in Madison Valley. The father's rheumatism made it necessary for him to reach Salt Lake City before the Winter set in. This was in 1863, and their route would take them through the gold town of Virginia City.

With the arrival of Ned Williamson, an old mountain-man, the party set out with a large freight-wagon load of vegetables. Josette and her father planned to go on to Salt Lake City, leaving Beach to find work near Virginia City. Williamson and the boy rode ahead, discussing the opportunities there.

Plummer, the sheriff, according to Williamson, was in league with the "road-agents," whose crimes were increasing in boldness and frequency. In an encounter with two horsemen Beach made an enemy of the "Wild Cat" in drawing his gun on him.

At Virginia City the vegetables and outfit were sold for sixteen hundred dollars in paper money to Carlton, the hotelkeeper. Two hundred dollars was left with him for Beach, Williamson taking the rest of the money and arranging to meet Content senior and his daughter at Snake Ferry, *en route* to Salt Lake City, to avoid the loss of the money in the hold-up of the stage-coach, which was almost certain to take place.

On the night that Williamson left, "Gold Dick," a miner, was robbed and killed. Plummer, the sheriff, charged Williamson with the murder and a posse was sent after him.

Beach was engaged to work for a lumber-mill owner named Holter and was sent by him to Bannack to purchase a belt for the mill machinery. On the way he met George Ives, whom he had been told was implicated in many crimes with which Plummer's name was also linked. Ives professed friendship for Beach.

BEACH reached Bannack City the next morning. He made a friend of Griscom, the express agent, and sought his advice. The agent warned him to be on his guard against the road-agents, also expressing his distrust of Plummer. Finding Jesson, the man from whom he was to purchase the belting, Beach was unable to buy it even after offering six hundred dollars in gold.

An attempt by one of the gang of thieves, named Baldy, to bully Beach into giving up his horse on the ground that it had been stolen was frustrated by Sessions, the Bannack minister. Baldy, however, left the field with ominous threats against the youth.

On the agent's advice Beach decided to leave for Virginia City that night instead of the next morning. On the return trip he heard two horsemen in pursuit of him and withdrew until they had passed. He went to sleep in a grove near the road, to waken in the morning and discover Baldy sitting by his horse, with the bags of gold at his feet and a gun in his hand. By a ruse Beach managed to blow Baldy's head off.

Proceeding to Virginia City, Beach met Ives, telling him that he had been robbed by Baldy, as he knew Ives had been with Baldy pursuing him the previous night.

He reached the town and returned the money to Holter, telling him, Beidler and Carlton that he shot Baldy. They warned him that Plummer had been informed of Baldy's death and that the sheriff would probably close his eyes to a plot by the Wild Cat to shoot Beach on the pretext that he was avenging Baldy's death. The lad was then sent to the mill for safety.

On the third day a party of six men surrounded the mill and the cabin. Beach killed the Wild Cat and wounded another man with his rifle, and drove the rest of them out of the cañon. The next morning a mountain-man, "Old Misery," came to the

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cabin and, being a friend of Ned Williamson's, was accepted as a friend by Content.

OLD MISERY and Beach rapidly became warm friends. Beach discovered gold in a creek and panned out a quantity of dust. The mountain-man came upon an Indian knife-sheath dropped a short while before, and the two were at once on their guard against an attack.

Word came from Virginia City that Beach would probably be attacked again by the gang, so he left the gulch for Prickly Pear Gulch. On the way they found more signs of Indians. In the valley Beach found a very rich vein of gold. After several days he estimated that he had fifty thousand dollars' worth of dust and nuggets in his cache. After a day of rich returns Old Misery startled Beach with the information that there were Indians on both ridges overlooking them.

As they were leaving the valley they were fired upon and returned the shots, hitting one of the red men. The next night while Beach was standing watch he narrowly missed death from the bullet of a lone Indian who had crept up to their camp. He killed the redskin. They left the cañon safely, the gold securely cached under a lightning-blasted tree.

While Beach was hidden in the mountains the nucleus of an organization to suppress the road-agents was being formed by Colonel Sanders in Bannack City, and by Holter and Beidler in Alder Gulch. But the gang's activities continued almost unchecked. The sheriff, however, was loud in his protestations that he would deal rigorously with the culprits, but he failed to find them.

Outraged by a particularly cold-blooded murder, a number of the miners hanged the "Spaniard," a member of the gang, who had committed the crime; but their action was premature and failed to halt the lawlessness. Shortly afterward Beidler drove three of the gang from the town for attempting a reprisal on the barkeep who had been instrumental in causing the Spaniard's death.

A report reached Virginia City that Beach had been found murdered, a blanket with his name sewn on it having been discovered over the body of a dead man whom Beach and Old Misery had first chanced upon, Beach covering the body with his blanket.

CHAPTER X

YOUNG CONTENT RETURNS

OLD MISERY and young Content saw no further signs of Indians although the mountain-man daily scouted the ridges enclosing the main valley. The new camp was more remote from the diggings than the first; but it was pleasantly situated and afforded wood, water and grazing. While the mountain-man searched the surrounding heights for hostile signs Beach pursued his luck down by the creek, where the shallow groove in the bed-rock continued to yield a rich store of nuggets.

More than once Beach endeavored to arouse his friend's interest, but each time the mountain-man, who would willingly walk five hundred miles to procure tobacco—smoked an infusion of willow bark as prepared and preferred by the Indians—refused to toil with pick and shovel.

One day, after a long harangue on the virtue of a few hours of labor in pay gravel far transcending the dubious outcome of following a line of traps, Old Misery surrendered and consented to try his hand.

He worked long enough to wash out one pan of dirt, and Beach estimated the yield to be worth twenty dollars. Old Misery bottled up the bits of gold, then kicked the pan aside and vowed:

"I'm through. I'm too old to work like a squaw. Squaw's work anyway."

"Great cats, man! There's twenty dollars inside of thirty minutes!" exploded Beach. "When Fairweather last April was trying to overhaul Jim Stuart and his party at the mouth of the Stinkingwater, and was robbed by Crows and turned back to blunder into Alder Gulch, his first pan showed thirty cents' worth of gold. His second showed a dollar and seventy-five cents. That second pan set them all by the ears and filled the gulch to overflowing with crazy prospectors and resulted in Nevada City and Virginia City. Now your first pan brings you a good *twenty dollars*, and you're ready to quit!"

"I have quit," simply replied Old Misery. "Won't twenty dollars buy me more tobacker then I'll be wanting to pack round with me? What if I had a whole mountain made of trade tobacker? Could I ever use it up? If I ain't dead by the time I've finished my twenty dollars' worth mebbe I'll wash out another pan, or trap a pelt. So I'll scout a bit. You'll dig out some more gold just for the sake of burying it again."

He was off on his insatiable quest to learn something more about the lonely country, his long rifle trailing, his old legs moving swiftly and with the light of enterprise in his ancient eyes. Of such a breed were the first pathfinders, the unsung men who smoothed the way for Government expeditions and the railroads, and without whom no frontier could advance.

With a shake of his head to tell the chattering squirrels that he failed to understand the old man Beach ripped up the ground

to reveal another short section of the treasure trough. He knew he was overlooking rich pay-dirt when he seized only upon the tiny nuggets. What he threw aside as tailings would have enriched a hundred Chinamen and would have afforded satisfactory pickings for a score of veteran miners.

But a new obsession possessed him now; He no longer dreamed of making a clean sweep. His viewpoint had shifted about until he became impatient at a gradual even if steady increase in his earnings. Also he was convinced that whatever he took from the ground must be taken before the snow came. So he concentrated on nuggets and had an eye only for the rich furrows.

With great regularity he carried his rich gleanings daily back to the camp and cached them at the foot of a pine between the spreading roots. Each day Old Misery came back, quiet and happy, his mind filled with visions of the dusky green foliage of mighty pines, of hillsides covered with the dead trunks of tempest-blasted monarchs, of slanting walls covered with tenacious evergreens and with rushing, nameless streams marking the lowest depths.

At first it annoyed Beach nightly to face Old Misery's gibes at his laboriously hiding what had cost so much physical effort to scrape up from bed-rock. But as his nervous zeal gave way for a routine peace of mind and as his fear of the Indians diminished he took his work and his friend's fun-making calmly. He was working for his father and sister, he kept telling himself.

Then came the day when he reached the end of the groove, and he knew his cached treasure was easily worth forty thousand dollars.

The day the groove was played out Old Misery announced: "You've had your own way, and I made up my mind to stick by till you'd finished. Now we'll go."

"Go where?"

"Back to Ramshorn. If things look likely from what we learn there we'll go on to Virginny City."

"But there may be another and richer groove within twenty feet of the one I've cleaned out!" cried Beach.

"And there may be a solid chunk of gold, measuring twenty feet three ways, right under our camp-fire, but I'm through with the Prickly Pear Valley," calmly replied the mountain-man. "I'd hate to leave you up here. Them Crows may take a notion to git a lot of braves together and make this valley a second visit. If they do they'll make a very thorough one.

"When it gits so that I can't see anything new after I've climbed a ridge it's time for me to move on. Then ag'in I'm deadly in need of strong liquor. I just got to have a rip-snorting drink, one that'll last from sunup to sunup."

"You'd forsake a gold-mine for a glass of whisky?"

"I can drink the whisky, can't I? That's more'n you can do with the gold you've been planting in this valley. As for quitting a gold-mine, I quit after washing out that one pan. We'll pack up this day and tackle the ridge we come down, only I've found a shorter way back. Mebbe we'll have a little fuss with Blackfeet or Crows on the way out." And his eyes glinted as he pondered over this possibility.

BEACH left the camp and walked rapidly back and forth and tried to come to a decision. Old Misery slowly puffed his pipe and watched him through half-closed eyes. At last Beach returned and dropped to the ground and confessed:

"I'm selfish. A few weeks ago I'd have been satisfied with a twentieth of what I've found. But I reckon the more a man gets the less chance he has of ever being satisfied with anything. We'll go."

"Now you talk hoss-sense. We'll pick up the second cache at the old camp on the way down the valley. If it wasn't for it I'd strike across the valley from here. Season's getting late. Time we was clearing out anyway. Next Spring if you feel poor you can sneak up here and rip out some more. But it's foolish to dig out any more when there ain't no chance to git it out of the country."

Beach had been forgetting the outlaws The Prickly Pear Valley had seemed very remote from the scene of their activities. His companion's words revived all his old fears. His problem was doubled. How to get the dust to Virginia City without anyone suspecting his luck; and how to ship it to Salt Lake City where it would be safe?

He had pleased himself during his working hours with picturing the delighted amazement of his father and sister when they were informed by Jack Oliver's Salt Lake City agent that some forty thousand dollars in gold awaited their disposal.

"I'll ride out with it. If they hold up the coach I'll give them a fight," he said.

"You've fooled round a-drawing your guns till you're most proper quick. I'll even say you're mightily slick. But you'd have no show ag'in' three men or more, hid in the bushes and armed with sawed-off shotguns," warned Old Misery. "You've got to out-Injun 'em.

"But let's not fret," he went on. "No use making new medicine till you have to. Mebbe they've been gitting their needing while we was up here. Perhaps the stages are going through without being held up.

"If the line ain't clear we'll cache your gold in Virginny City and turn to and help make it safe. It'll only take a certain amount of killing to make everything hunky." Again the gleam of pleasurable anticipation lighted the faded eyes.

They did not start that day as night would have overtaken them by the time they made the top of the ridge. The morning was frosty, and Beach now knew that he was tired of washing dirt and picking up nuggets. He was weary of the lonely valley and hungry for the companionship of men. He wondered that he had received Old Misery's first announcement so ill.

Now that he was ready, Beach could not depart too quickly. He was the one to fret and show impatience. Finally the last pack was strapped on, and they rode from their camp for the last time.

As they were passing the narrow gulch where rested the Indian above ground, as his savage heart would have desired, Beach quickened his pace. Old Misery reined in and gravely said: "Keep going. I'll overtake you at the old camp. Just want to see if he's resting right."

Beach doubted if he would have visited the lonely bier, formed by the shelf of rock, for the value of all his cached gold. He rode on with the pack-animals and was dismounting at their first camp when his companion rode up.

"Seemed to be all right," announced Old Misery. "I let him have one of my blankets —the torn one."

THE gold was soon recovered from its hiding-place. Old Misery had so thoroughly familiarized himself with the topography of the valley and ridges that he had no hesitance in striking across to the divide. At the base of a furrowed ridge he led the way to what they had overlooked on traversing the ridge when entering the valley—a winding trail which the heavy rains had failed to make impassable. It was a rough scramble, but without any serious difficulties they gained the crest and followed it along to the height of land overlooking the broad Crow Valley.

They came to a long narrow opening, clear of bushes and fallen timber, and were debating whether to camp there or press forward and seek a path leading down into the valley, when they were put on their guard by the sudden appearance of a warrior around a bend in the trail a few hundred feet ahead. He raised his hand, palm toward them, in the signal of peace.

Old Misery leaned forward, his eyes glaring from beneath the shaggy brows. The one thought in his head was the shame of it if his young friend should get this near to the goal and then fall a victim to the Indians. He returned the horseman's signal and warned Beach:

"Keep your hands away from them guns. You can git 'em out quick enough when you need to. He's a Siksika—a Blackfoot. Can't be more'n two or three behind him, or they'd have laid low and ambushed us. I talk their lingo some. S'long as they're between us and the valley we must have a powwow."

He signaled for the warrior to advance and at the same time began riding slowly forward. The warrior hesitated a few seconds, then touched his heel to his pony. Three other warriors rode into view. All carried muzzle-loading rifles as well as bows and arrows and shields of buffalo hide. Eying each other suspiciously, white and red advanced.

Beach was nervous with excitement, but felt none of the old fear. He held twelve lives in his belt and knew he could draw and shoot before an Indian could maneuver his long rifle. What he did not appreciate was the red man's dexterity in handling his bow, and the incredible rapidity with which he could release half a dozen arrows, each as deadly and as accurate as a rifle ball at short range.

The Indians halted twenty feet from the white men, and Old Misery reined in and saluted, "*Haul*" (Good!)

"*Haul*" replied the leader of the four.

Old Misery began talking, using the sign language and but few words. The red

spokesman replied, the exchange of signs being swift and graceful. As the two conversed Old Misery interpreted for Beach's benefit:

"They're Siksika, or Blackfeet proper. They love the white men. The —— liars! They are going north to join their band and kill meat for Winter. If game is scarce they will Winter at one of the Hudson's Bay Company posts.

"They belong to the *Ikunuhkahtsi*—'All Comrades'—a military society. The last is a lie. They're all young warriors and are out to win an eagle feather by killing some poor devil if they can catch him alone. I am now telling them to look for the dead Crow in the Prickly Pear Valley.

"I am telling them you have big medicine in your belt guns and that it's stronger than any medicine they have in their Sacred Bundles. They don't like my talk, but it makes them shy of starting trouble.

"They are saying that Napi—'Old Man'—one of their big gods, is stronger than all the white gods. I am telling them we have come from the Flat Head country and have met several bands of Blackfeet. They think I am lying, but ain't sure.

"Now we will swing to the right to pass them. They haven't offered to smoke, and that looks bad. Hold your head up and look as if you didn't care a cuss; but keep your eyes peeled. I'll come after you and the packs."

The Indians advanced, passing the white men at a walk. Beach and his friend turned their heads to guard against treachery. The rearmost Indian leaned from his saddle and extended a hand as if to examine one of the packs. Instantly the mountain-man's rifle covered him and his raucous voice warned:

"Napi, the Old Man, will be saying, '*Hau*' to my red brother very soon."

The Indian straightened up. Beach did not understand what his companion was saying, but at the sound of his voice he was looking back with a Colt in his left hand. The four quickened their pace and disappeared at a gallop.

"They'll make a try for us before sundown—and that'll be mighty soon," assured Old Misery. "We must find a path and take down the ridge. They can't follow without their ponies making a racket and giving their game away. And they won't want to leave their ponies and follow us afoot. So whatever they do they must do soon. Darned fools, these young bucks! Crazy to count coup!"

THEY pushed on, and the winding trail permitted the Indians to approach within short range should they so desire. The mountain-man reasoned that an attack would be made on foot but that the red men would not leave the crest of the ridge.

Although anxious to locate a path leading down into the valley he insisted that Beach keep in the lead with the pack-animals. They covered a mile, and both were believing the Blackfeet had decided not to risk a fight when Old Misery's rifle cracked spitefully, causing Beach to jump nervously in the saddle. A howl of pain, followed by a shot, answered the mountain-man's bullet.

'Dust out of here!" cried Old Misery, riding beside a pack-animal and kicking him into a greater show of speed.

Three arrows streaked by him, one narrowly missing Beach and one sticking into a blanket roll and whipping back and forth as the flexible shaft vibrated venomously. The moment they turned a bend in the trail Old Misery softly called a halt, dismounted and began reloading. Leaving the animals, he ran back to the turn with Beach at his heels. There were stealthy sounds in the growth on both sides of the path.

"Rake the right-hand side with one gun," Old Misery whispered.

The heavy Colt spat out six shots in a blurr of booming detonations, and the telltale agitation in the bushes ceased.

"That's halted 'em. They don't hanker for any such fast-talking guns. Now we'll race back and ride on."

There was no sound of pursuit, nor did Old Misery expect any; yet he rode most of the time with his eyes searching the back trail. Once he dropped behind, against Beach's strong objection, but soon came up, saying:

"If they're after us they ain't very close yet. I hit that cuss all right. That cuts them down to three fighting men. Trying to count coup on me! *Waugh!* But they may hang round and try to jump us after we've made camp. We'll fool 'em by keeping on down the slope where they won't follow."

He rode ahead and very soon turned from the trail and plunged into a thicket of bush

growth. Beach could see no evidence of a trail, yet followed in blind confidence. He found he was in a dry gully, and the rocks made precarious footing for his horse. The descent was steep and presented many obstacles, such as boulders and fallen trees, but soon Misery left it and swung into a faint path that led in a long diagonal to the valley bottom. Several shots were fired at them from above; but the bullets went wild, as the Indians were shooting by guess. Beach would have returned the fire had not Old Misery objected.

"We're already in the shadders. It's gitting dark in the lowlands. They don't have much notion where we be," said the old man.

And as they descended the sun dropped down below the western mountains, leaving the valley of the Crow to night even while the top of the ridge was limned with light.

They halted on a bench half-way down the slope as the thickening dusk made further travel dangerous.

"If they'd had 'nough spunk to foller us they'd never 'a' give themselves away by firing their guns," commented Old Misery. "They've quit for good. They'll have to git their eagle feathers with some one else's hair," he added, as he hobbled the tired animals and removed the packs.

DESPITE his confidence that the Blackfeet had given up the chase they did not venture to build a fire and divided the night into two watches. Before sunrise they were up and eating tough meat which the mountain-man had sun-cured in the Prickly Pear Valley. Their descent to the creek was unmarked by any untoward incident.

Old Misery's sense of location allowed him to take a course which cut that followed by them on the former journey across the valley.

"Now we'll switch and travel south," he mumbled. "That poor cuss' grave oughter be close by here."

"A poor chance to find that small brush heap," said Beach.

Old Misery halted his horse and swept his gaze about, his brows drawn down in perplexity. At last his face cleared and he triumphantly announced:

"There's where it was! See, the brush is all scattered round. Wouldn't be s'prized if them Blackfeet up on the ridge happened along here and tore it to pieces."

Beach glanced about uneasily, apprehensive lest his gaze rest upon a gruesome spectacle left by the Siksika. Instead he discovered a long, low mound at the edge of the spruce and pointed to it questioningly.

Old Misery was irritated that the young man should be the first to discover the mound. He jumped from his horse and ran to it. Beach remained in the saddle. The mountain-man was some minutes in examining the mound; then he startled Beach by throwing back his head and indulging in a cackling burst of laughter.

"What did you say your name is, younker?" he called out when he could check his merriment.

"You know my name. Why ask foolish questions? And it strikes me as being mighty poor taste to be laughing just now. Let's be pushing along."

"But you can't go any farther. You're dead," snickered Old Misery.

"——, man! Are you crazy? You can't be drunk," angrily retorted Beach.

"Reckon I'm crazy," replied Old Misery. "And I'd like to know for sartain. There's one way to prove it. If you don't see what I seem to see I'm crazy. Just hop over here and take a squint."

Annoyed and yet puzzled, Beach joined him. Old Misery pointed to the tree nearest the grave where the wounds in the bark had not had time to heal. Neatly engraved was the announcement:

BEACH CONTENT, VIRGINIA CITY
KILLED BY PARTIES UNKNOWN.

"Lord help us!" whispered Beach, his eyes wide with the mystery of it, his whole nature wincing as he glared at the mortuary statement. "I ain't dead. There must 'a' been two of us by the same name."

Old Misery exploded in a violent fit of laughter.

"Can't you see it's a good joke on the Virginny City folks? They think they buried *you*. Some of the men come up here and found the dead man under the brush. He was like you in build, and his hair was the same color. They made him a better grave and cut your name on the tree—Ho! Ho! But they'll be surprized when you ride into town all alive and smiling!"

Beach stared at the tree for fully a minute, and then sharply commanded: "Quit your laughing. It's a poor kind of a joke."

And, taking his knife, he effaced the first line and above it carved:

UNKNOWN YOUNG MAN BURIED HERE.

After he had finished Old Misery insisted:

"Just the same it's funny. And I'd like to see how that little runt of a Beidler takes it when you show up with your gold and them young whiskers you're wearing."

Beach felt of his soft, curly beard and his long hair, and then stared at the back of his hands, as dark as an Indian's, and wondered if his face was of the same hue. Slowly there grew up in his mind an idea—Virginia City was believing him to be dead. His beard and unkempt hair and deeply tanned face would permit him to gain Beidler's cabin unrecognized, he believed. This would solve one of his two problems—the getting the gold into town with none being the wiser. He said nothing to Old Misery as he wished to think it all out in detail. Already he knew he and the old man must part company before reaching Virginia City.

THEY halted in the timber on the slope below the point where the ox-road turned from the gulch to mount the divide between Ramshorn and Biven's. Beach was depressed in spirit.

"No sign of the three smokes Beidler said Holter would make," he remarked.

"If there had been any smokes we'd 'a' seen them 'way back," was Old Misery's complacent answer. "And why should they send up a smoke-talk for a dead man?"

Beach winced.

"I was forgetting. I'm supposed to be dead."

"Them fellers down there ain't dead. They're hypering round like beavers chewing willow bark."

Old Misery was pointing to several minute figures working about the mill.

"You lead the packs down the slope, moving slow-like. I'll ride ahead and see if I can find Holter. He'll tell me how things are doing in Virginny City and if it's all hunky for you to go back there."

The mountain-man sent his animal scrambling down the rough way. Beach dismounted and led his horse, the pack-animals following. He took his time so as to give Old Misery ample opportunity to go and return. He contrasted his present condition with the few days when he was living alone in the gulch. Then he had been glad to work for whatever wages Holter was able to pay; now he was returning with what to him was great wealth.

Being in the spruce timber, he was concealed from sight of those in the gulch, and before reaching the end of the growth he halted the animals and seated himself to await Old Misery's return. He could see nothing of the creek and depended entirely upon his ears to learn when the old man came back. At last he heard voices and knew that there was more than one man approaching.

"Ya-hoo!" called the mountain-man's voice. "Show yourself, pardner."

Beach completed the rest of the descent and beheld the mountain-man and Holter at the foot of the ridge. The latter started for him on the run and seized both his hands.

"We all believed you were dead!" he cried, pumping Beach's hands up and down. "I'm more pleased than I could tell you in a million years. I was all broken up when they fetched in that blanket with your name on it."

"Ho, ho! So it was your blanket that you made me wrap round that poor cuss what give them the notion it was you!" loudly exclaimed Old Misery between chuckles. "Had your name on it, huh?"

"I remember now. Stupid of me not to think of that," said Beach sheepishly. "Josette stitched my name on it. I'd forgotten all about it. But now that I'm alive again, what about Virginia City and the road-agents, Mr. Holter? I want to get back there. I've made a strike and want to get it under cover."

Holter stepped back and stared at him thoughtfully.

"Not expecting to see you because I supposed you were dead, I'd never have known you unless I'd looked mighty sharp and had looked more than once. The long hair and whiskers and the Injun color of your face— Yes, I believe you can ride into Virginia City without any one suspecting who you are, especially if you arrive there after sundown and don't stop to talk with any one.

"As to the road-agents, it's now known that Lloyd Magruder, who kept a store for two months on Wallace Street, and four of his friends were murdered in the Bitterroot Range and robbed of fourteen thousand dollars and more than twenty mules. The murderers were four members of the gang.

When I was last in town there was lots of talk on the quiet about cleaning up the whole band. But nothing's been done yet, and the road-agents are working faster than ever. Lots of robberies; quite a few killings.

"Looks like they was trying to make a big stake before Winter. Colonel Sanders, of Bannack City, is all heated up about it. X is anxious to begin, but wants to be sure the town is behind him; for he figures there are a hundred of the scoundrels all told. So I believe that times are as bad as ever, perhaps worse, just now. I advise you to stay here while your friend rides into town and reports to X and then brings a word back to you."

Beach shook his head impatiently.

"No; I've made up my mind. I won't hide here. Your men would have to know who I am, and inside of a few days the news would reach Virginia City. It would look as if I was scared, or was guilty of something. The bold course is the best."

"I believe you ought to stay here," persisted Holter anxiously.

"Face the devil if you want to make him run," broke in Old Misery. "My notion is to slip into town, git rid of the dust, then look all them varmints in the eye and tell 'em to go plump to ——."

"You're giving him poor advice. You'll be leading him into danger," sharply replied Holter.

"What! Me? Him? Why, he killed the only Injun that died on our trip. They'll never git him if he sees 'em first. He's slick. Every day he put in so much time yanking out them belt guns. Arms folded. *Plop!* Two guns looking you in the face."

"That's fine if he could only see them first," said Holter. "But he won't. He'll never see the man behind him. Anyway come up to the cabin and eat and rest your nags. It's eighteen miles into town, and it'll be time enough to decide after you've had a bite."

They proceeded to the cabin and on the way were curiously watched by the four workmen. As they were about to enter the cabin one of the men pressed forward and eagerly asked—

"Ain't you young Content, who they're saying was killed on Crow Creek?"

"I'm the same fellow," admitted Beach. The man shook hands with him and hurried back to tell his mates. To Holter Beach said—

"I don't remember ever seeing that man before, yet he's seen me some time and remembers me."

Holter was disturbed over the incident and insisted that it was proof that Beach should keep away from Virginia City until he knew his friends would be on the lookout for him.

"Beidler may be away—Nevada City or Bannack," Holter objected.

"His cabin is never locked," returned Beach. "I can put up there. Once I get my gold under cover I don't care how quick the news that I'm alive spreads."

The two friends mounted and rode up the ox-road and on to the divide. The eighteen miles were covered within an hour after sundown. When half a mile from the town Old Misery dropped back with the pack-animals and allowed Beach to ride along alone.

CHAPTER XI

THE LAW ASKS RECKONING

BEIDLER stood speechless and made no move to accept the extended hand.

"I thought you'd be glad to see me," said Beach with a little smile.

Then he dropped his hand and pretended to be leaving.

"Beach Content, by the Eternal!" cried Beidler, leaping after him and throwing his arms about his neck and well-nigh throttling him. "Love of truth! How does it happen you're not buried in the valley of the Crow?"

For an hour Beach talked, uninterrupted by his rapt listener except as Beidler softly exclaimed in joy or grunted in amazement. Even at the end of the hour Beach had not finished, and ceased his narrative only because of the low rap on the door. Beidler darted a hand to his belt of weapons on the table, but Beach stepped softly to one side of the door and motioned for his friend to open it.

As Beidler threw open the door a querulous voice complained:

"Any one would think I was a hostile Blackfoot. Do you figger I'm going to stand out here all night, you little runt?"

"See here, old man, you've talked me little and talked me runt all you're going to," angrily cried Beidler.

"You peppery little cuss!" softly murmured Old Misery. "At that I reckon you'd

climb me in a second if I wasn't bringing a peace calumet along. You'd climb a grizzly, too!"

"What the —— do you want to stir me up for?" harshly demanded Beidler. "And what do you want here?"

"He's all right," spoke up Beach. "I hadn't reached the point in the story where he and I separated. He dropped back with the pack-animals. Come in, pardner; and remember that Beidler is one of my best friends."

"Good Lord! As if I didn't know that already, with you dinging it into me every day about what a game little rooster he is!"

In despair Beidler tossed up his hands and stepped away from the door. Old Misery, still chuckling, picked up the two packs he had removed from the pack-animals before rapping on the door, and stepped inside and dropped his burden in a corner.

"There!" he grunted. "Just throw some bags of flour or pertaters over 'em and no one'll know the better. Mr. Beidler, I'm glad to see you ag'in."

With a wry grin Beidler accepted the scrawny hand and shook it warmly and urged the mountain-man to be seated and visit. But Old Misery had not yet had his long-deferred drink, and the pack-animals and his horse were waiting to be taken to the corral. Swearing himself to secrecy as to Beach's return and promising to look the two up in the morning, he hurried away.

"Forty thousand dollars?" incredulously whispered Beidler as he stared at the two small packs.

"Maybe I got the wrong kind of stuff," soberly suggested Beach. "Old Misery doesn't know much about pay-dirt. But open one up and give your opinion."

Beidler did so and exclaimed repeatedly as he pawed out handfuls of nuggets, practically all pure gold. When he was finally convinced of his friend's good fortune he rose to his feet and caught up his big hat. He swung it above his head and indulged in a lively pantomime of giving three cheers and a tiger. Finally he sobered down and gravely asked: "What will you do with it? The gang is getting bolder than ever."

"Leave it here in the corner with some odds and ends thrown on top of it," promptly answered Beach. "No one suspects you of having worked any diggings. I came without any pack-animal. Old Misery would never be suspected of having gold if he had a whole train of packs. We came into the gulch separate. He and Holter and you are the only ones to know of my luck. Three tight men."

"Won't he blab in his drinks?"

"Nary a blab. He's been a mighty good friend to me. You mustn't mind his way of talking."

"Such as my being a 'little runt' and a 'little cuss,'" growled Beidler.

"Exactly. He thinks you're a mighty big man in spite of all that. When he says those things he does it just to see you rear up and show fight." Beidler grinned ruefully.

"All right, Beach. I'll disappoint him from now on. He's done you a good turn; that's enough for me. Now what about your plans?"

"I thought it out while riding in alone. I'll pretend to be working for Holter so I'll have an excuse for sticking around until there's a chance to run my stuff out of the country. Of course it'll be known I'm alive and back the minute I stick my head outdoors in the morning."

"Of course," mused Beidler. "And the gang is still sore about Baldy and the Wild Cat. Wish I'd known you were alive. I'd sent word for them to hold you in Ramshorn Gulch until I could reach you and plan for Old Misery to take you over the mountains and south to the Snake and the Salt Lake Road. It'll be hard to work that now."

"I'm going to stick here," stubbornly insisted Beach. "I don't believe Plummer will care to make a fuss over those two scoundrels. He won't do anything that points him out as being the leader of the gang."

"Oh, Plummer will fall into your arms and weep with joy," assured Beidler. "But that won't hinder some of his men from sticking a knife into you when you ain't looking."

"I'm here to stay. I could even ask Plummer for that deputy's job. He'll think I'm busted. He'll never suspect I'm a pilgrim."

"Now wait a minute," muttered Beidler, scowling at his big boots under the table as he tried to corner an elusive idea. "Since you've been away we've made some progress in building up an opposition to the gang. Colonel Sanders is for breaking loose at once. I'm for waiting until I can get hold of a squealer and making him squeal and tell who's the head of the gang. When

we strike we want to strike high. Then the others will be scared and the gang will be broken up over night. The colonel is just as willing to start at the bottom and work up to the leaders."

"And he's right!" boldly declared Beach. "Swing off the leader the first thing and the others simply scatter and get together somewhere else, with any one of them evil and knowing enough to act as leader. But pick them off one at a time, beginning at the bottom, and you'll get the whole crowd before they realize their danger."

"Maybe," quietly agreed Beidler. "Do you know Red Yeager?"

Beach shook his head.

"He tends bar at the Rattlesnake sometimes," said X.

"I don't think the bar was open when I was there. There wasn't any red-headed fellow there that night. Why do you ask?"

"I've figgured that either he or old Hilderman will blab if cornered. I was wondering if you could get into the confidence of either before the others of the gang learned you're back. Either one might tell who's the leader. I believe it's Henry Plummer, but some of the men behind me don't think so. They believe he's taking the game as it lays, perhaps getting something on the side, but not actively concerned."

"Hilderman was there that night. He knows me. I don't think Yeager ever saw me to know me."

"His stamping-ground has been the Rattlesnake Ranch when he wasn't carousing in Bannack. Just now he's at Lorraine's ranch, half a day's ride from Dempsey's. He's alone."

Beach remained silent for several minutes and turned the half-veiled proposition over in his mind. Now that he had won gold and had brought it to town with none besides his true friends being the wiser he was very loath to take up any new enterprises. On the other hand, the very fact that he was a man of means served to incense him against the outlaws. He could no longer whistle carelessly on meeting a robber. Beidler, watching him anxiously, finally broke in, "Stand up!"

Beach wonderingly complied.

"Now let's see you draw."

Unconscious of the act, Beach presented both guns. Beidler cried out in joyful surprize:

"You'll do! You've been putting in time practising that. You did it without stopping to think. Can you shoot after you've drawn?"

"Old Misery used to watch me, and he reckoned I was pretty slick," modestly replied Beach.

Snapping his fingers in exultation, Beidler leaned forward and whispered:

"This is my plan. Leave here early tomorrow morning and ride to Lorraine's. I'll start a man out tonight with a word from me to 'Black Jim,' a friendly herder. He'll be down the road to head you off if there's any one beside Red Yeager at the ranch.

"If Red's alone you go on and make up to him. Be reckless in your talk. Get confidential with him. It should be easy as he's been drinking hard. If he hints at your winning some easy money you can play off a bit and say you fare better when you trust only yourself; that numbers make it dangerous.

"You can work him around until he brags about the men behind him, and when he does that you can ask for a showdown, and it ought to be easy to learn who the head men are. Once you get the names slip away and come back here."

"And my bacon will be cooked to a crisp the minute he comes to town and finds out the game I've played," dubiously protested Beach. "I don't like it."

"He'll be fuddled with drink. He won't remember things straight. He'll never admit to the head men that he ever told things. And you'll get here first with no one knowing you've been to Lorraine's. Once we have the names of the leaders we'll strike; and it'll be some one else's bacon that'll be burned."

"I don't like it a bit," repeated Beach. "But if it's my share of the work in cleaning up I'll do it. I must do my part."

"We must all do our part," gravely agreed Beidler. "Much of the work won't be pleasant. Trouble has been we've been waiting for the other fellow to take the lead. Let us make a beginning, and I can answer for a thousand men to fall into line behind us."

"All right. I start early tomorrow morning. But what if Red isn't there?"

"Then come back as fast as you can and we'll plan something else. Perhaps we'll even decide it's best for you to serve as Plummer's deputy—that idea rather tickles me."

"Then I don't fancy it so much as you do," Beach grimly retorted.

EARLY next morning he rode to Lorraine's ranch, arriving shortly after the noon hour. Before he reached the ranch building he was held up by a ragged herder, who gave his name as Black Jim.

He said Red Yeager had left the night before for Dempsey's. Glad that his trip had terminated without any disagreeable incidents, Beach went to the herder's hut and ate and then started back for Virginia City. He camped and slept for a few hours on the return trip and rested his horse.

He arrived in town in the morning and found the street filled with quarrelsome men. It was the old story of belated war news arousing hostility between the Northern and Southern adherents. Disposing of his horse, he repaired to Beidler's and found his friend trying to mend a broken violin.

"Wild-goose chase. Yeager wasn't there. Gone to Dempsey's," announced Beach.

"I've been having lots of thoughts since you went away," murmured Beidler without interrupting his work on the broken instrument.

"Plummer won't care to have another honest deputy shot to pieces. The Dillingham affair taught him a lesson although the murderers went free. He doesn't want that stuff repeated.

"Now of course your safety comes first. Instead of working for Holter you'd better get a job as deputy sheriff with Plummer. It would be better for you, and you might learn something that would help us immensely."

"Being his deputy would be a joke," said Beach. "He wouldn't send me out on a real case. Then there's the danger of my getting tarred with the same stick that some time must tar Stinson and Ray."

"A joke so far as he figures," agreed Beidler. "But if he does send you after a man you can surprize him perhaps by getting the man. It'll be dangerous work but not so dangerous as standing the chance of being shot down or knifed when you ain't looking. If you serve as his deputy I don't believe the gang will be allowed to make you any trouble because of Baldy and the Wild Cat."

Beach did not take much time to decide, and said—

"I'll see Plummer at once and try to hook on."

"He's down at Bannack today, pretending to chase road-agents. While waiting for him to come back you'd better stick close to the cabin. If you must mix with people go to Kessler's. It's very seldom any of the gang goes there now."

He did not add that this falling off of banditti patronage was largely due to his few minutes' service as bartender.

IN THE mean while Sheriff Plummer, returning from Bannack City, discovered he was in an uneasy state of mind; a most unusual mental phenomenon for him to experience. He searched his memory for the cause and could find nothing to alarm him. Finally he decided that Colonel Sanders' bearing at their recent meeting had subtly affected him. Apparently the colonel had changed none and was pronounced and decisive in his views, cordial yet blunt, as he always had been since the sheriff first met him.

But as Plummer looked back on their several conversations within the last few days he believed that there had been a certain restraint in the colonel's behavior. It had not been obvious enough to be noted at the time, and of course hind-sight might be highly colored by the imagination. Yet the accumulative effect was to make the sheriff perturbed as he jogged along to Virginia City.

Plummer knew that for a year various men had talked about him behind his back. The talk had started in whispers on the day when Plummer shot and killed Jack Cleaveland for rivaling him as leader of the newly organized band. For a year the sheriff had played a desperate rôle, but never before had this cloud of doubt settled over his reckless nature.

He sought a surcease from worry by telling himself:

"The boys have been too rough. They ain't satisfied with getting the dust. Killing that man at the milk-ranch wasn't necessary. That Magruder affair was poorly carried out.

"That's the mistake we've been making; too many jobs against individuals. So long as the stage-coaches are held up the public won't bother to take notice. If I could make one big haul before snow flies I'd pick a good man and ride south."

In the next breath he told himself he was foolish to lose his nerve; that he was still sheriff and had his own men as deputies.

Aside from these officers of the law there was no machinery for enforcing order. Nothing could happen to catch him off his guard. At the very worst he always would have time to ride for it.

Then he proceeded to criticize this line of reasoning and make himself uncomfortable by wondering if he hadn't been overbold. Times had changed, and the technique of the gang had changed none. New men were coming in daily; men who might react against the gang before they had had time to grow afraid of the shadow.

New roads were opening up, down which the intimidating news of the band's daring and ruthlessness had barely had time to wander. Men were coming from the Deer Creek Cut-Off near the Platte, where there was a telegraph station and soldiers; and this route, between three and five hundred miles shorter than the old roads, gave the immigrants a flavor of law and order, and precipitated them into Alder Gulch uninfluenced by the ominous stories that were ever feeding out over the mountains to Washington and Salt Lake City.

Dillingham had been killed because he would not run with the pack. The sheriff was now inclined to doubt the wisdom of that brutal murder. Perhaps it would have been better had he kept his honest deputy alive; perhaps he could have played the game longer and more successfully had he been more subtle and had retained a few honest men as associates.

Yes, he was quite convinced that the daylight assassination of Dillingham had been a tactical error. For it was always possible to divert the zeal of decent deputies to some delinquent who had no contact with the established gang. But in the beginning it had been so easy to kill when it seemed necessary; and a conscientious officer had been such a nuisance. And now, as Plummer rode into Alder Gulch, he wondered if Dillingham dead were not more dangerous than Dillingham alive.

As he dismounted at the hotel he was astounded to behold Beach Content. The young man advanced and shook hands warmly. There was something fortifying to the sheriff in that hand-clasp.

"My, my!" cried Plummer in his hearty, genial voice. "And we'd been taking it for granted that you'd been killed by Indians! How brown and well you look! When did you get back; where have you been; how did the other fellow come by your blanket? Come inside and tell me all about it!"

In a corner of the hotel office Beach frankly related his experience in Ramshorn Gulch and glossed over none of the details in connection with the Wild Cat's death. The flight north to escape possible reprisal because of the tragedy was as candidly set forth, including the killing of the Crow Indian. No mention was made, however, of the rich diggings and the forty thousand dollars in gold.

"Bully for you! Glad you got the Wild Cat. Saved me much trouble. Wish you'd got more of them," warmly endorsed the sheriff. "And I'm glad you got your Indian. Now you're back and Winter is upon us, what'll you do?"

"John Beidler advises me to work for Holter, but Holter can't have much need of men until Spring. I told Beidler I'd rather be a deputy sheriff."

At the mention of Beidler the sheriff's gaze narrowed, but the conclusion of Beach's speech was warmly approved.

"You ride with me and you'll get as good, if not better than, anything Holter can pay," Plummer heartily promised. "And who knows but what you can land some of the Magruder killers and collect the reward? It's almost impossible to get good men to serve as deputy sheriffs. To be frank, I'm not satisfied with the lazy ways of Ray and Stinson. But what can I do?"

It was almost as if he had been publicly accused and was trying to make out a decent case before his youthful listener.

"Almost every man who's worth his belt guns is up to his neck in schemes to make a fortune. Ask any of them to help the sheriff and they'll laugh. When could you start in?"

"The sooner the better."

"Good! I'll allow you three hundred dollars for horse, saddle and guns. You can use your own and be that much ahead. You're on the pay-roll now. Drop in here this evening and perhaps I'll have a job for you. If I'm not here just ask at the desk if I've left any word for you.

"I'm mighty glad to see you back. I'd have hated like sin to write on to your father and that pretty sister and tell them you'd been wiped out by redskins. You'll be staying on at Beidler's?"

Beach nodded. With a frank smile Plummer continued:

"Sometimes I feel that Beidler doesn't

like me very well, but one can't please every one. He's honest, and a good citizen. You couldn't have a better stopping-place. He did the town a good turn when he ran those three Bannack City toughs out of Kessler's place. Wish he'd plugged the three of them!"

And for the first time Beach learned the details of that affair, with the sheriff generously according Beidler much moral courage in his encounter with the desperadoes. Plummer told it all with so much gusto and was so sincere in narrating his own ill-luck in being absent from town that Beach found much of his suspicion allayed.

After all it might easily be that Plummer, unable to employ as helpers the best type of citizens, and realizing the futility of coping single-handed with the lawbreakers, was allowing affairs to take their course and waiting for the time to come when he would receive adequate support. There was something very likable about the man when he assumed his bluff, genial air; and Beach returned to the cabin somewhat befuddled in his estimates of his new employer.

When he told Beidler the news the latter was much pleased, and, contrary to expectation, said nothing disparaging about the sheriff.

"You're mighty good on the draw, Beach. 'Most as quick as I am. Don't grin, young man; when a fellow is most as good as I am on the draw he's prime slick.

"Now listen: I believe Plummer is shifting his bets. I think he has decided to make folks believe he means business. He plans to stand from under any trouble regardless of what he may have been up to during the last twelve months.

"I don't think he'll send you out to be killed. A few weeks ago I would have feared that. But he must have received some word about the people's resentment to the gang's acts.

"If he does plan, though, to face about and save his hide by showing himself to be a real officer of the law he ought to have another deputy. I'd feel more easy if that old pirate was your riding-mate."

"Meaning Old Misery?"

"The same."

Beach nodded and smiled.

"Money won't tempt the old man, but the chance of a fight may. I'll put it up to Plummer."

The suggestion instantly appealed to the sheriff after Beach had found him on the street and submitted the proposal. Without any hesitation Plummer declared:

"By all means! He's old, but he can stick on a horse. He ought to be able to handle a gun. Fetch him along to the hotel this evening. I'll hire him. I'd like to hire a dozen good men."

When Beach reported back to Beidler the little man smiled placidly:

"It takes a heavy load off my mind," he explained. "If he'd made excuses for not taking the old man I should have feared he was planning something nasty for you because of Baldy and the Wild Cat. Now I feel safe. He'll send you two out to catch sluice-thieves and the like; after men who don't run with the gang. But you pull them in; they're lawbreakers. This is going to work out much better than as if you had met Red Yeager.

"There's but one thing to guard against—the discovery that you have gold. Let the gang learn that and they'll rush us in a crowd and get it, even if it means they must ride over the range immediately."

"No one will know unless they come in here and go poking around," said Beach.

"There's no chance of that. Better corral your aged friend. He's been drinking rather heavily at Kessler's."

Beach found Old Misery loudly haranguing at the bar and took him away. The mountain-man outwardly did not seem to be much the worse for his debauch, and on learning of Beach's new office he at once declared his willingness to serve in a similar capacity.

A few hours of sleep in the cabin quite restored him, and on awakening he was his old loquacious self, boasting of the deeds of his youth and anxious to encounter new hazards. Beach had him eat and then took him to the hotel to meet Plummer.

The sheriff was waiting for them and lost no time in outlining their first piece of work. The two Fellows brothers and three companions had run off ten horses from the Rattlesnake Ranch, the same being the property of the Oliver Stage line. They were supposed to be making for the Beaverhead country.

Here was work that fitted in with Old Misery's fancy. Regardless of whether they rounded up the thieves or not the ride over the mountains, he declared, would be

worth more than all their efforts. And he was hungry for mountain travel.

Equipped with their blankets, their weapons, a frying-pan and a few pounds of bacon, they made the Big Hole Fork, and from a Rattlesnake Ranch trailer learned that the five men had struck north as if making for Hellgate River.

"Good country. I know every foot of it," chuckled Old Misery, thoroughly in his element and almost indifferent as to whether they overtook the horse-thieves or not so long as they could continue their wandering.

He pointed to the eastern rampart of the Bitterroot Range, in less than a year to be the western boundary of that magnificent inland empire Montana, and exulted:

"The Old Missoury, the Columbia, the Colorado, all start from springs up there and flow to two oceans and the Gulf of Californy. Lord, but there's bigness for you! I can throw a dipper of water, that's started for that Atlantic, into a spring that'll send it to the North Pacific.

"Hope these cusses we're after just kindly keep on going till they reach the Flathead Lake country. From the southern end of the lake there's fifty miles of the best grass, water and wood a mountain-man could ask for.

"If we don't have mighty bad luck we won't catch up with them fellers till after we've passed through Hellgate Pass, a forty-mile cañon that even Jim Bridger couldn't sneeze at. When I was a younker it was named that along of the Injuns always hiding up there to ambush trappers. Once you git through the pass you come to the Rond, a round prairie that's mighty fine to look at and graze your hosses on."

"If we're not unlucky?" expostulated Beach. "Please remember that the sooner we overhaul the thieves the better it'll suit me."

"But they can't do no harm up here," remonstrated Old Misery. "What differ does a few days or weeks make so long as we nail 'em afore we git through?

"But that's the way of the young!" he went on. "Reckon I was that way when the days meant nothing to me and I didn't have to count 'em. But what good to be keen over catching hoss-thieves when you can enjoy life in the Hellgate Valley and look at the western peaks with their hoods of snow the year round, mighty like a Sioux capote that's been whitened with clay?

"Wait till the chase takes us into the Missoula country! Best timbered of any in this end of the territory. Not only timber, but grass; for it's there that the warm winds leak through the Rockies and make old lungs say, *Waugh!* Ah, but there's country for you! We can look for days and never see a smoke except our own."

Beach held his tongue, realizing how impossible it was to impress it upon the old man that they were bent on a grim business and that scenery was a secondary consideration. And yet the younger man missed but little of the majesty and grandeur of the wide-flung ranges and peaks, or of the beauty and appeal of every little prairie and lovely valley.

But as his companion had said, he was young and need not count his days. With the prodigality of youth he would lavishly wish time away that he might obtain some transient objective, and in so doing would hasten by those glories the Great Builder had heaped for His children, white and red, to behold.

The weather, especially at night, was cold, and a sprinkle of snow covered their camp one morning. It was gone with the rising sun; yet the air continually grew cooler, and a fire was always necessary for comfort once they made camp. Even down on the little tributaries of the Jefferson Fork the miners were abandoning their work for the season because of ice in the sluice-boxes.

The sunsets were glorious and a daily marvel to Beach—a lake of fire that overflowed the horizon and flooded the zenith, then receded to permit the stars to blaze forth their eternal message. Old Misery quaintly explained the Milky Way as being the dust kicked up by celestial herds of buffalo, and took pleasure in heaping up pine logs on the fire and in watching the column of sparks relieve the gloom of the melancholy forest.

As they traveled they furnished their camp kettle with meat supplied by the mountain-man's rifle, with Beach knocking over small game with his hand guns.

And as the days passed the spell of it all made a deep impression even on the younger man until his errand became a thing very aloof, something unreal. The eons of time required in building up these mighty buttresses of stone, these rushing streams cutting deep through the rock, and the brooding forests, all reacted upon his plastic nature and for

the moment dulled his interest in the pigmy activities of frontier ruffians. He found nothing in the majestic calm of the heavens, nor in the long deep cañons cut by erosion or formed by glaciers, that suggested the covetousness of man, the only animal he knew of that killed and stole far beyond his immediate needs.

One night after a day of unusual loitering and proportionate enjoyment, Beach threw a log on the fire and decisively announced:

"With sunup we must be back to our work. It's no use from now on, old friend, for you to try to get me aside to show me new wonders. From now on we're deputy sheriffs, and we're after horse-thieves."

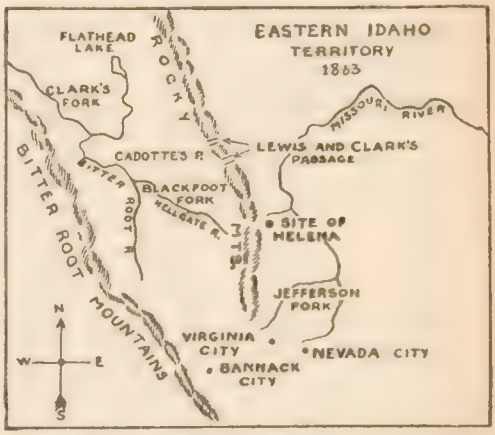
"Every day has its sunset," sighed Old Misery. "And the sunsets are gitting scarcer for me, like the buffalo for the Injuns. If you're round when I go over the last divide just kindly remember I'm like a Crow Injun—I'd rather be put on a ledge of rock, or up in a tree to dry, than to be hid under the ground.

"Of course what I want can't be if I quit the game in town. But if it's out here, where there's plenty of room, just hark back to what I'm saying. I'm a Crow Injun in certain ways."

"Nonsense, Misery; you'll outlive all of us. Couldn't kill you with a camp-ax," protested Beach.

"You've got a good heart. But when I left you in Prickly Pear Valley and went for to see how the Crow brave was resting I felt he had the best of me unless I could have my shelf of stone. When I was younger I didn't care a cuss, but having gone through so many Winter counts I'm gitting notional. We won't say nothing more about it. I don't ask for anything that don't come free and easy like."

The next morning they pushed their quest in earnest. Beach's reckoning was a day behind that kept by the mountain-man. But this difference was quickly forgotten when they met two miners outward bound from some new diggings just north of the Blackfoot. From these men they received news that accelerated their pace amazingly; for the miners said that five men, answering to the description of the Fellows brothers and their associates, were drinking and carousing at Cyrus Skinner's place on the Hellgate before making a dash for the Cœur d'Alene country west of the mountains. The prospect of a fight spurred Old Misery to double speed, and he quite tired out his companion as he rode hard and fast where the way permitted.



Where windfall or scorched timber choked the way the old man doggedly pursued the journey afoot, always calling out impatiently for his young friend to follow him. He alarmed Beach by warning that once the five men crossed the Bitterroot Range and reached western Idaho there would be but small chance of overtaking them.

Late one afternoon they rode through a thick growth of pine and beheld Skinner's long, double log cabin, ranch and saloon. Beach's garments were torn and worn from travel, while his long hair, beard and swarthy complexion made him a fit companion for the old mountain-man. Old Misery's buckskin garments had resisted abrasions better than had the more modern garments of the younger man; but the two looked wild enough to have lived for months in the mountains.

They had agreed upon a plan which was extremely simple. There would be none at Skinner's place to know Beach by name, and Old Misery would be one of the last men to be suspected of serving as an officer of the law. Their story was to the effect that they had been prospecting and had been driven in by the approach of Winter. Their scanty packs and lack of dust would be ample proof of their lack of luck.

As they rode up to the log building a woman came to the door and shaded her eyes with her hand and stared at them. Old Misery chuckled, not at the woman but at the sight of ten or a dozen horses in the corral near the cabin. Through the

open door and windows came the sound of rough hilarity, liberally seasoned with oaths.

The two dismounted and turned their weary animals loose after removing saddles and blankets. As they advanced the woman stepped from the door, her sharp glance darting from the mountain-man to Beach. The latter held her attention, and with a side twist of her head to make sure none of the men were at the window she hurriedly advised:

"Ride on and camp. We're full here."

"We're too dog-goned tired to move another step, ma'am," replied Old Misery.

"Hush!" she fiercely cautioned. Then to Beach—

"Take your hoss and friend and ride on."

"We're played out and hungry," said Beach.

"Always room for two more," cried Old Misery with an inane laugh.

BY THIS time the confusion inside subsided. The woman glanced from the mountain-man to Beach and murmured:

"I've done my best. Don't git them mad. They're in licker. They may act up ugly. Days of it now with no let-up. Soon they'll be fighting."

"Hooray! I love a fight!" softly cried Old Misery.

"Hi! What's the powwow out there? Who is the new men, Nellie?" cried a man, and a face, showing bloodshot eyes and a goatee, was thrust out of the window.

"Only two travelers who want a place to spread their blankets and a bite to eat," answered Old Misery.

"If we're too crowded, Cy—" began the woman hopefully.

But Skinner ripped out an oath and declared he was never too crowded to take in honest wayfarers.

Inside was a scene of wild revelry. The few glasses on the short bar had been smashed, and the boisterous company was now drinking from tin dippers and stout mugs. Cyrus Skinner, bloodthirsty and most unscrupulous, could thank a fox-like cunning in his make-up for being alive on this brisk October day. He was one who could plot most nefariously and then push forward another man to endure the brunt of the risk, just as some believed he had planned the Magruder murders and then left it for Howard, Romaine and others to deliver the mortal blows.

When the new deputies entered the long room Skinner was behind the bar, drinking each time a round was ordered. Texas Bob and Alex Carter were there, blood brothers, also the two Fellowses, thin hawk-faced men, not yet out of their twenties but with the predatory visages of men long used to violent crimes, and their three satellites. All wore long mustaches and were, as one, brushing these aside to gulp down a drink, just as Old Misery stamped on the floor with his moccasined foot. He smashed down the butt of his rifle on the puncheon floor and sounded the war-cry of the Blackfeet.

"Shut up that hullabaloo!" roared Skinner.

"Go straight to ——, you mountain goat!" roared back Old Misery, his white whiskers bristling. "And one more yelp out you and I'll hop over there and comb you most mortal."

Frank Fellows, the older of the brothers, laughed in great enjoyment, slapped his hand on the wet bar and declared the mountain-man had the proper spirit. His brother, Bud, a thief by every instinct, stared at Misery and Beach. Finding nothing in their equipment to excite his cupidity, he endorsed his brother's sentiment with a broad grin.

Skinner gave the old man a murderous glance, smiled genially and invited—

"Toss down your blankets at t'other end of the room and join us if you ain't squeamish in your drinks."

Old Misery leaped into the air and cracked his heels twice together and made a sweep with his rifle that barely cleared the heads of the company. He repeated his ear-splitting war-whoop and proclaimed:

"I'm more buf'ler then human. I walk on my hind legs only when meeting up with he-men. When I'm dry I drink the Hellgate River to the stones. When I'm hungry I swaller all the game to be found in two days' travel.

"My pardner's young, but wild as a pigeon-hawk by natur'. We'll spread our blankets where we like, and we'll drink, gamble, fight, or eat every tenderfoot in this crowd flat on his back. *Waugh!* Gimme room! Gimme liquor! Or —— is loose!"

Skinner again endeavored to mask his resentment. The Fellows gang laughed uproariously, and Bud Fellows clapped Misery on the shoulder and told him he was a yard wide and all wool and should drink until his

teeth drowned, and be —— to the man who tried to interfere with a decent man's thirst.

His welcome of Beach was more circumspect, the two eying each other cautiously. Beach looked wild and disheveled enough, and the light of youth in his eyes was a challenge to Bud.

"Ever rassle?" jerked out Bud after his inventory of the slim hips and the trim shoulders.

Beach took his cue from Old Misery's hyperbole and readily answered—

"Just enough to slam you on your back faster'n four of your best friends can set you up on your pins."

"Hoorooah!" yelled Frank Fellows with drunken enthusiasm. "Go after him hard, Bud. He's a game little rooster, but even his heels can kiss the top boards."

WITH a howl of delight Bud threw aside his belt and plunged madly at Beach. Beach had no time to discard his weapons; but with a strength stored up by the Summer's labors he caught his opponent by crotch and shoulder, and, almost before the initial rush had ended, hurled him over the bar, bowling over Skinner and eliciting a stream of horrible blasphemy.

Texas Bob and Carter, tried members of the gang, shouted in delight. Frank Fellows was so deeply amused over his brother's defeat that he was incapable of any demonstration. Bud emerged from behind the bar, his hair dripping with spilled liquor, his face bleeding from the contact with broken glass.

The vulpine lust, however, was gone from his gaze, and his eyes only gleamed with a desire for battle. He was surprized at the outcome of his bellicose rush and showed it; yet he was cynically amused at himself, for he believed he had been taken unawares. And he fully expected to even up the score at once.

"Sort of fetched me that trip, you —— wildcat," he admiringly muttered.

And this time he approached Beach more carefully.

Beach unhitched his belt and threw it aside.

"*Waugh!* Gimme a chance at him and any man he wants to pick out!" bellowed Old Misery. "Hi, you feller behind the bar with a goat's face, come out here and have a good-natur'd fuss with me."

Skinner showed his teeth in a mirthless grin and growled:

"Don't be too brash with your fighting talk, old man," he warned.

"To —— with you and your advice!" boasted Old Misery. "I can lick any galoot in this room, and he knows it! Blindfold me and tie one hand behind me, and turn me loose against your best man!"

This amused Frank Fellows so deeply that he rested his head on the bar and indulged in a series of short, staccato yelps. Then, straightening up, he good-naturedly seized Old Misery with one hand by the neck. There was a bewildering whirl of legs and arms, and when the blur settled down to component parts Fellows was standing on his shoulders in a corner, and the mountain-man was flapping his arms and crowing like a cock, even as he had crowed more than thirty years before at St. Charles on the Lower Missouri when he fought the bully's battle for the red belt.

Fellows slowly came to his feet and cried:

"By ——! You're a most proper old galoot, and there ain't no hard feelings! Any one who picks you up as soft game has another guess coming!"

Bud Fellows, who had halted to observe how his brother fared, grinned confidently.

"I was took by surprize that first time. Just watch me now."

And he leaped for the second time upon young Content.

Beach closed with him and at once found that aside from gouging and other bestial tricks the man had no skill as a wrestler. There was a brief shifting of holds, a twisting and a squirming about, and once more Fellows flew over the bar and again carried Skinner to the floor with him.

Skinner was first on his feet, this time with a hatchet in his hand; and with a wild mélange of profanity he leaned across the bar to strike at Beach. Frank Fellows stayed his arm. Bud Fellows struggled to his feet and by throwing an arm under Skinner's neck managed to drag him back and deprive him of his weapon.

"Stop it, you dog!" he hoarsely growled. "I ain't been thrown proper for a coon's age, and back in old Missoury I got rough-handling a plenty. These two wildcats are all right for the drinks. What couldn't they do with a quart of liquor under their belts! Ain't that right, Frank?"

With an amiable grin Frank Fellows cried:

"They're all right. They fit good with us. Every one have a drink. Now let's all sing:

"Once there was an old gal,
Old in the love I had for her;
Once there was an old gal——"

THE drunken chorus was interrupted, accompanied by a smashing of mugs and dippers, while each bronzed throat was stretched to accommodate the passage of the fiery liquid. The Fellows gang seemed to be surfeited with good nature. Skinner was furious with a murderous hatred toward the strangers, but he took care to cover up his true feeling. Texas Bob and Carter were fast becoming befuddled with drink and turned eyes on the scene that saw but little.

That the Fellows brothers nursed a tiger's lust beneath a boisterous exterior was soon proven, when after a round of drinks Bud gave a shrill yell and reached across the bar. He grabbed Skinner by the throat and began howling:

"Gimme a knife, somebody. Fish out my knife from the table, Frank. I'll kill this dog!"

Old Misery brought down his rifle barrel on the clenched hands, breaking the grip and only by a rare chance not breaking bones, and cried:

"I'm bad! Don't r'ile me! Don't damage the man who sets out the liquor!"

And the rifle muzzle swept back and forth, fanning the group.

This interference impressed the would-be slayer as being excrutiatingly funny; and, nursing his barked knuckles, he laughed loudly. The assault seemed to sober Skinner, who now withdrew from the bar and motioned for Carter to handle the trade. But all desire for violence suddenly seemed to have effervesced, and the group became quite orderly.

The woman called Nellie timidly approached half-way up the room and announced that supper was ready. With grotesque sedateness the men trooped down the room and took seats at the rough table. Helped by an Indian woman from the Flathead Mission, Nellie served the rough fare and disappeared. Much crude jesting flew back and forth, but none of the guests seemed to harbor ill-will against any one.

Skinner, however, kept silent except for a few sullen and vindictive words to Old Misery and Beach. The latter rejoiced that none in the company seemed to have heard his name. The story told by the mountain-man, perhaps because of its topographical detail, was readily accepted. After listening for some minutes to the old man's garrulous talk Frank Fellows boasted:

"We have a better game than that. No depending upon luck; no starving or freezing. Our game is a sure thing every time. Hi, boys?"

This appeal met with a general confirmation, although Bud Fellows frowned at his outspoken brother.

"Pooh! We're all old friends here!" cried Frank Fellows. "This young feller will make a good man for us. The old cuss already seems to be a rip-snorter."

"Count me in on anything where I don't have to break my back a-picking and a-shoveling. I'm all through with hunting for gold," bawled Old Misery.

"I reckon I can step along if there's any money in it," calmly said Beach.

"You two'll do!" warmly declared Frank Fellows. "You've proven your mettle. We try men with hoss-play. If they weaken they ain't for us. We're quitting here tomorrow. Come along with us and we'll show you gold right on top of the ground. All you have to do is to pick it up."

"H'ray!" hiccoughed Old Misery.

Skinner scowled at the mountain-man and remarked to Beach:

"You ain't been drinking, I notice. I reckon you don't care for honest liquor."

"I don't know. I never tried any. I've always needed my nerve, and I've always reckoned that drinking spoiled my gun-play."

"Then you do shoot a little?" asked Texas Bob in a jeering voice.

"I shoot a lot!" corrected Beach.

"If you happen to be shooting at a target," gravely amended Carter. "Always providing you can get your guns out——"

"You're drunk," said Beach. "When you're sober you shall race me in drawing guns."

"Good!" cried Frank Fellows. "That's game talk. —— me if I don't take a shine to you, young feller."

"Carter may be a bit under from drink, but I ain't," spoke up Texas Bob; and he stroked his goatee complacently.

Skinner laughed and made much of this speech and winked knowingly at the Texan. Frank Fellows stared from one to the other

of the two men and seemed to be inclined to resent the Texan's challenge. Beach said:

"I'll race you. But just how? Shall we empty our guns first?"

Frank Fellows leaned against the table, his right hand holding a revolver, and said:

"Texas, I don't like the way you laugh. You two can draw without pulling trigger. I'll bore the man who shoots! Stand clear of the table and fold your arms, both of you. I'll count, 'One, two, three—draw!' Don't make a move for a gun till I say, 'Draw'."

Texas Bob rose with a swagger. Beach stood opposite him. Both folded their arms. In a loud voice Fellows slowly counted, and after a slight pause cried—

"Draw!"

It seemed to the onlookers as if Beach's two guns were out before his rival had made a move toward his weapons. Alex Carter in drunken honesty proclaimed:

"Looks like you was hitched up hard and fast, Tex. Young feller, I don't want any of your fight."

Much disgruntled, Texas Bob seated himself, the sneer gone from his face. The Fellows gang cheered Beach and insisted on drinking profusely to his efficiency. Then the two brothers stood up against each other, and at the word grabbed for their guns. Beach's eyes opened very wide; he saw that either one of them was as much faster than he, as he was faster than Texas Bob.

He frankly said—

"If I'd stood in front of either of you I'd never got started."

Old Misery noisily insisted his friend was the quicker and offered to fight any man in the crowd, backing his long knife against a Colt. And so with much arguing, all good-natured, and with much drinking, the supper was finally finished. Frank Fellows appeared to be perfectly sober after the evening meal, and with no trace of his former exuberance he drew Beach aside and quietly asked:

"Want to ride along with us tomorrow? We start early for the Cœur d'Alene country. We are taking ten head of stolen horses over the mountains to sell."

"I'll ride with you if my friend can go along," readily replied Beach.

"He's welcome. Some cantankerous old cuss! And the hosses being stolen don't make no difference to you?"

"If they wasn't stolen I wouldn't bother to ride with you."

"That fits in with me! Enough said. Play square and you'll be used square. Try any dirt and I'll shoot both your eyes out. You've seen how quick I work."

"I reckon you'd do just what you say," said Beach.

FELLOWS took his brother Bud aside and spoke a few words to him and then talked with the other three members of the gang. All seemed to be of the same opinion, and expressed it with nods. There was no more drinking that night. All retired early. Beach did not sleep well, for the morrow and its work was ever confronting him. Old Misery slumbered as peacefully as a child even though he knew the problem facing them after another sunrise.

They were astir early, and the two women soon had breakfast on the table. Neither Skinner, Carter nor Texas Bob put in an appearance, however. The horse-thieves, grim-faced, implacable men this wonderful morning, were through with drinking for the time being.

Bud Fellows was in a savage temper, and Beach got the idea that he resented his poor showing at wrestling in the barroom. He kept clear of the two recruits. It appeared that Frank Fellows' word was law.

As they started from the ranch Old Misery found an opportunity to say to Beach:

"They're going to follow down the river half a mile before turning north. We must strike before they turn. I'll take the start in gitting their attention and you can then hold them up with your belt guns."

Beach nodded and fell into the rear of the little procession.

All went smoothly so long as they followed down the river, but when Frank Fellows reined in and announced that they would change their course the climax began unfolding. Old Misery, as if eager to take the lead, sent his horse scrambling out to one side. Beach dropped back behind the stolen horses as if to round them up.

The five men were now well bunched together, satisfied to let the two recruits do the work. Old Misery raised his long rifle, covered Frank Fellows and commanded:

"Stick up your hands. *Quick!* We want these hosses."

The action was so unexpected that the five men stared blankly for a moment. The mountain-man's words were first reacted to by Frank Fellows, who began lifting his hands, his eyes straying toward Beach. The latter was sitting with both guns drawn and covering Bud Fellows and the other three men.

"Up with them paws, all of you!" cried Old Misery, the rifle now weaving back and forth to give personal warning to each of the quintet. "Up with 'em, or die! One, two, three——"

Frank Fellows commenced swearing softly, almost gently, the low, even outpouring of oaths being all the more horrible because of the lack of emphasis.

Bud Fellows raised a loud cry and for a moment threatened to ride down the mountain-man.

"Make a move, young feller, and your brother dies," snapped Old Misery.

"Euchered, by ——!" groaned one of the men.

"Who are you fellers anyway?" asked Frank Fellows in a curiously strained voice.

"Deputy sheriffs from Virginia City," spoke up Beach.

Fellows began laughing in a whining undertone, and managed to gasp:

"By ——! That's good! Henry Plummer turned thief-catcher! That's good! —— good!"

"Every man keep quiet," warned Beach. "We're going to take the horses back. What happens to you depends on the way you behave. We were told to get the horses."

He sent his own mount forward and shoved a gun back into the belt. With Old Misery keeping guard with the rifle Beach punched the muzzle of his hand gun into each outlaw's back to keep him quiet while he stripped them of their weapons.

"Now we'll strike south," said Beach.

THEIR progress was slow and their nights times of horror to Beach. As they neared the point where they could elect to cut the Virginia-City Bannack stage line or make direct for the Stinkingwater and thence down to Alder Gulch, each night of divided watches etched new lines of worry on the young man's face.

Bud Fellows fumed and vowed a horrible vengeance, but it was his brother whom Beach feared. After the first day Frank Fellows refused to speak, but there was something so deadly in his silence that he would have been a relief to his guards had he broken out in helpless profanity as did his companions. Instead he remained silent and as venomous as a rattlesnake. He watched every move his captors made and said nothing. At night, when it was Beach's turn to stand watch, the man's eyes were open and following him.

Each day there was the frequent inspection of bonds. Beach was gradually building up in his mind the notion that Frank Fellows was unconquerable and might at any moment throw aside his ropes. Each evening and morning there was the tedious delay of freeing one man at a time and allowing him to eat. But it was Frank Fellows whom Beach always stood behind and watched and not his loud-voiced brother.

These were the only meals taken during the twenty-four hours, and between them there was ever the fear in Beach's mind that Old Misery would fall asleep at his post, or grow careless. And throughout the slow journey south Frank Fellows watched and waited.

THEY crossed the divide to the Big Hole River and suffered much from the frosty nights. Wintry blasts at times swept the range, and each night Old Misery complained more and more of the cold and the lack of sleep. The old man was growing querulous without knowing it, entirely unlike the brave days of Ashley, Jim Bridger and Manuel Lisa. He developed the habit of contrasting the climate with the ancient days when the hot blood of youth served as a thermometer, and declared that the seasons were growing more rigorous.

After the first day's journey down the Big Hole on the east side of the mountains Beach made an early camp and slept for a few hours in the late afternoon, and then stood the whole night's watch and allowed his old friend to sleep. He knew he must come in contact with civilization without loss of time, for he no longer trusted to Old Misery as a guard. If ever the five men were to try to escape it would be soon; for the shadow of the noose was already upon them. And all this time Frank Fellows kept silent, and waited.

Beach's plans went wrong and the cavalcade did not meet with miners or others

who could help take charge of their prisoners. The horse-thieves took much time in eating, and were threatened with starvation by the alarmed deputies. Bud Fellows slipped his leg ropes and fell from his horse, hanging head down in a most dangerous posture. The day that Beach had planned would see them intercepting a line of travel was largely wasted in correcting various mishaps; and as the sun began balancing on the western skyline he knew he must put in another night.

They pitched camp as usual and fed the five men one at a time. Although nearly crazy because of worry and lost sleep, Beach directed Old Misery to take to his blankets, promising to call him at the regular hour. Instead of arousing his friend, however, Beach paced back and forth and fought against outraged nature until near sunrise.

As he threw fresh fuel on the fire, made his rounds and examined each man's bonds he observed that Frank Fellows was awake and watching him. It worked on his nerves. The man said nothing, but there was a terrible fixity of purpose in the steady gaze. When compelled to give his back for a moment Beach felt the force of the malignant eyes, and would wheel about to find the fellow glaring at him. Along toward morning he was so unnerved that he leaned over the quiet figure and hissed:

"—— you, Fellows! Keep your eyes closed, or I'll string you up now and let a miners' court pass on your case later."

Fellows smiled and showed his teeth and said no word.

With the first flush of the new day Beach cast off the morbid spell and aroused Old Misery and smiled patiently at the mountain-man's upbraiding.

"You stood double watch ag'in!" cried Old Misery. "And it's ag'in' human natur'. Now that we're within striking distance of diggings and miners you're going to sneak a little sleep while I'm making coffee. Simply scan'lous the way you 'low that no one but you can keep his peepers open."

Beach gazed about at the camp. He could foresee no danger, and he drowsily muttered:

"All right. I'll sleep two hours. Don't try to feed them, but just keep watch. If ever they plan to make a break it'll be today."

And a minute later he was unconscious to the world and all its perils.

A strange clamor, much like dream stuff, beat on his inner ears. Then came fragments of oaths and horrible yells. He fought against it as he would a nightmare, but at last he opened his eyes and ears and found that it was no piece of his imagination. For Old Misery was screaming:

"Wake up, pardner! They're loose and got guns."

There followed the fearful *boom, boom* of Colt forty-fours, a scream of pain, thin as a woman's, and with the sleep still in his eyes Beach threw off the heavy body that had fallen upon him and staggered to his feet. A dead man lay half across his blankets, an outlaw who still clutched a clasp-knife in his hand. Bud Fellows was flat on his back, his eyes wide open and staring toward the sunrise he would never see.

Two men were attacking Old Misery, who was using his rifle as a club in holding them off. Frank Fellows, a ferocious, furious figure, was leaping over the dying fire, a gun in one hand and a camp-ax in the other.

The gun shattered the harmony of the quiet spot, and Beach felt himself turning half around from the impact of a blow on his left side. Acting mechanically, he flashed out his two guns and shot Fellows through the neck and head, and with his left hand picked off one of Old Misery's assailants. Old Misery went down, but with a final effort grabbed a gun dropped by the man Beach had shot, and fired it at his surviving adversary even as the man thrust him through with a knife.

It was over.

The fire crackled and burst into ruddy flame. Somewhere off in the woods a squirrel scolded over some domestic problem. The fire flared up. Around it in grotesque postures were five dead men and one who was dying.

Beach staggered to the old man's side and heard him mutter:

"Just mixed things up like a derned old fool! Didn't look at their ropes. Bud got clear as I was putting dry wood on the fire and cut t'others free. Then they jumped me. I got him all right."

This with deep satisfaction.

"Then t'others jumped me," he went on. 'Some one let out a hoot. Pardner! Young pardner! The old man was careless! Forgive!"

"Misery! Old friend!" brokenly wept Beach.

"That's the —— of dying. Some one always feels bad," choked the mountainman.

"Friend! Old Misery! Hear me!" sobbed Beach.

"I got him all right . . . . What a fine morning! So light . . . . Lord! What a bully morning! So light . . . . The ropes, they got 'em clear . . . . What a fine day!"

Beach stared through his tears at the canopy of gray and steel-blue still covering the eastern sky except where a small area was painted crimson by the hidden sun.

"You're a big chief," faintly whispered the old man. "Make up a new song about you . . . . Wear a new feather bunnit . . . . Take a new name . . . . Squaws crazy over you!"

He ceased speaking, and Beach believed him to be dead when he muttered:

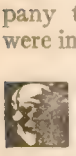
"Boy, don't hide me in the ground. I'm a Crow. Don't hide me in the ground."

Beach rested his head on the old man's breast. He felt faint, and he knew he was hurt; but that didn't matter.

Then Old Misery's voice, strong and raucous, began crying aloud about other days. He was a youth with Etienne Prévost and helping with the boats up the Missouri. He was arguing with Jim Bridger about certain mountain passes. He was in a Crow village scolding his squaw for not sweeping out his lodge. Speaking very gravely, he said—

"Then let us smoke and have peace."

And he was gone to join the brave company that conquered the mountains and were in turn conquered by them.



BEACH, filled with sorrow, dragged and carried the old man's meager body to a shelf of rock some twelve feet above the camping-place. He composed the limbs and threw his own blanket over the remains and placed the rifle alongside. It was Old Misery he was burying above-ground; he knew that much. And then, curiously enough, it was the Crow warrior in the little gulch opening into the Prickly Pear Valley. How he came to be riding his horse he never knew.

Will Rumsey, outward bound on the Salt Lake City coach, was the first to discover him, a babbling figure, swaying in the saddle, his horse limping painfully. Behind him followed a troop of riderless horses.

CHAPTER XII

"STICK UP YOUR HANDS, SIR!"

OCTOBER gave way to November, and the riot of crime became more furious and ferocious. Stages were held up, and travelers on horseback and afoot were halted and robbed. Street fights with knives and revolvers were common occurrences in Bannack, Nevada, and Virginia City. Some of these disturbances could be attributed to the temper of Northern and Southern partizans after the tardy receipt of war news, but the greater number were due to the reckless and drunken banditti streaming into town to gamble and drink up the proceeds of their many raids. The loss in life and property had mounted high by the time December fastened its icy grip on the country.

Then came the murder of Nicholas Ibalt, which aroused the desperate citizens to some radical action. Many other crimes fully as atrocious had been committed between Grasshopper Creek and Alder Gulch, but it remained for this particular one to become the pivot on which reprisals were to swing.

Ibalt went to Dempsey's ranch to invest a hundred and fifty dollars in mules. The amount of money was insignificant when other hauls made by the gang were recalled. The total sum would scarcely finance one boisterous spree of a Whisky Bill, or barely afford a George Ives an introduction to a faro table.

Shortly after Ibalt's arrival at the ranch a hunter named Palmer penetrated a thicket of willows on the bank of the little stream near the ranch to secure a prairie-chicken he had shot. He tripped over the body of the dead man.

Word spread rapidly of the mule-buyers' death. The mining season had closed, and pilgrims and tenderfeet were at leisure to consider the lawless condition of the country. The community rubbed its eyes and wondered if the horrible situation must endure. And the murderers had not even bothered to conceal their victim. This grim insolence was a slap at the pride of Alder Gulch.

Ibalt's bloody body became the beginning of the Cause. It was loaded on a cart, brought to Nevada City and formally identified.

Virginia City suddenly discovered that it

was profoundly shocked, and riders were sent to Bannack City. It was whispered upon the long street through Alder Gulch that certain men had held a secret meeting in Nevada City and had agreed upon a course of action. An inexorable agency was to begin exterminating the outlaws.

The long-deferred day, which Colonel Sanders, Beidler and others had worked for, had come!

Members of the gang laughed at the idea and drank and gambled and filled the towns with lawless activities. But theirs was a false security!

A POSSE was despatched to the scene of the crime, where two herders were under suspicion. A surprize visit to the herders' hut, two miles from the ranch building, revealed the presence of George Ives, Texas Bob, Long John French, Whisky Bill, George Hilderman and Alex Carter. These men were promptly arrested; and, what was more surprizing, they offered no resistance.

Six days after Ibalt's death the prisoners were brought to Nevada City for trial. But ruffians had been tried before, only to be acquitted. The long-suffering community was inclined to be skeptical. Although it was rumored that a new tribunal had been organized, the lawless remained confident that the trial would result in the charge against them being dismissed.

The vicious element began growling and making horrible threats when Colonel Sanders arrived from Bannack to conduct the prosecution together with Major Charles S. Baggs. Only two of the six, Ives and Hilderman, were held, the others being discharged.

The outlaws smiled complacently and ceased their threatening. Then it was bruited about that Long John had "been talking" to his captors and had told many grisly secrets. The ruffians began parading the street, their hands on their weapons.

A jury of twenty-four men was selected, and the trial of Ives commenced. That the criminal organization had funds and prestige and proposed freeing Ives by playing a seemingly legal game was shown by the appearance of five lawyers to defend Ives. But it was an ill omen for the outlaws when all saloons were ordered to be closed. This peremptory command smacked of a stern purpose.

The grumbling increased. It was definitely learned that Long John had talked and had implicated Ives. This was not a trial conducted by a vigilance committee; that innovation was yet to come, although men who were to launch the new league were present to watch the proceedings and see that justice was done.

The main street of the town was the court-room, and a blazing fire of logs dispelled the wintry chill. For a background towered the silent, snow-covered mountains.

Don L. Byam, as judge, sat high on a wagon with the jury in a half-circle around the fire before him. Inside the circle were the prisoner and his lawyers, the public prosecutors, and W. Y. Pemberton and W. H. Patten, the last two being selected to take down the evidence. Back of the semi-circle the street was crowded with armed men, both lovers of law and order and those who still believed their days of evil were not ended.

Gradually it grew upon the consciousness of the silent spectators that something more important than Ives' fate was to be decided in this trial; that it was to be determined whether crime was to remain in the ascendency or cease.

Ives denied the crime and blamed Ibalt's death on Carter. His bearing was bold and confident. He knew that he had many friends among the onlookers, and he missed none of the menacing threats and intimidating gestures to belts heavy with weapons. If Sheriff Plummer was not in the foreground his presence was felt by the prisoner.

Once the trial was well under way all the audience became convinced that there was to be nothing farcical in the proceedings and that if Ives escaped it would be because of a breaking-down of the evidence. Long John's confession took on sinister weight.

Those who loved peace and those who loved evil braced themselves for a final move. Ives was depending upon Plummer to effect his release should the sophistry of his counsel fail. But Plummer did not relish the grim patience of this gathering and delayed an attempt at rescue by violence, hoping against hope that Ives' five lawyers would get him free.

So it became a duel between the five and Sanders and Baggs. As the opposing forces repeatedly clashed it was evident that the prosecutors were having much the best of it in a clean-cut, decisive presentation of the

facts and those portions of the evidence which were circumstantial.

Ives began to lose his composure, although absolutely fearless by nature. Judge Byam, a real patriarch, presided as composedly as if in some ancient eastern courtroom; and step by step the case against the outlaw was perfected. After each clash it was obvious that the defendant was so much nearer conviction.

At last the prosecution rested. The defense desperately attempted to rally, but at last was compelled to admit that its efforts were exhausted. Fresh fuel was dumped on the fire. Pemberton and Patten withdrew with the jury to refresh any man's recollection from the written evidence.

The jury took two ballots; first, voting that the accused was "guilty of murder as charged"; secondly, deciding that death by hanging should be the penalty.

After the verdict was reported back to the court Ives stood up and gazed about the somber ring, his blue eyes seeking for Plummer; his only hope being a rescue. But already Plummer was busily planning his own escape from the country he had terrorized so long. Mutterings and oaths and the metallic click of revolvers being cocked came to the prisoner's ears. Then a section of the crowd surged forward, and, Colonel Sanders' voice rang out—

"Stand back from the prisoner!"

And Ives' friends knew any overt act would mean his death by a bullet.

"Give me time! Give me a little time!" pleaded the wretched young man.

With a gesture toward where the murdered man rested on the cart Colonel Sanders demanded—

"How much time did you give the Dutchman?"

Honest men began working in between the prisoner and his friends. Sanders climbed on the cart and in a loud voice moved that the prisoner be executed at once. An unfinished house within thirty feet of the half-circle furnished a beam for the rope. It was growing dark, and each moment of delay brought danger of a fierce rush and the prisoner's disappearance

In less than an hour after sentence and without further ceremony the doomed man was led to the improvised gallows and executed, Robert Hereford acting as hangman. Long after he died the street remained filled with people, the greater majority of whom were much surprized in realizing that they had been able to hang a murderer.

Only one spectacular incident marked the close of the day. After Ives had been hanged several of the gang decided to kill Colonel Sanders as soon as they could find him. A friend, who had overheard the plan, found Sanders in the gathering darkness and warned him, begging him to retire. But instead of placing himself among his friends he went in search of his would-be slayers.

He encountered them on the street and was asked by them to step out behind a house. He readily complied, although knowing their purpose. As the group gained the rear of a building the colonel's revolver caught in his pocket as he was drawing it and was discharged. The men who planned to assassinate him believed that he was opening fire upon them and raced away into the darkness.

Long John was allowed to go. Old Hilderman was quickly tried and banished from the country, it being evident that he was scarcely above the plane of an imbecile.

Five men from Virginia City and one or two from Nevada City completed the final arrangements for what was to be the Montana Vigilance Committee. This organization was functioning rapidly within a few days after Ives' execution.

Henry Plummer now feared for his life and used all his cunning in plotting to escape from the country before every road was barred.

John Beidler, known throughout the Territory as X, began his wide travels in running down suspects. The little man with the big hat, flopping coat and large-topped boots became a familiar figure in town and in the mountains. To the outlaws he speedily became a Nemesis.

"Stick up your hands, sir! You're wanted in Virginia City," spelled the end of many a bad-man.

Two days before Christmas twenty-four men braved the rigors of mountain travel, the discomfort of extreme cold weather and a heavy fall of snow, and rode by the way of the Stinkingwater to the Big Hole. They came upon Red Yeager on Deer Lodge Creek, but failed to identify him, and he managed to carry warning to his friends. He had better have used the time in quitting the country, for after traveling through a forty-eight-hour storm the little band surrounded the Rattlesnake Ranch and caught

Stinson and Ray, Plummer's deputy sheriffs, and Yeager.

The deputy sheriffs pretended to have Yeager under arrest for horse-stealing and were about to let him go, they said, on his promise to return to Bannack City and stand trial. The deputies were allowed to go for the time being; but Yeager was overtaken and carried to Dempsey's ranch, where Brown, the secretary of the band, was captured.

That afternoon the two men were taken to Lorraine's ranch and tried by the vigilants that very night. Red Yeager, as Beidler had surmised, turned garrulous on being told that he must die, furnished a list of the more important members of the band, and named Plummer as the chief.

The list also included the names of the Magruder murderers. Yeager and Brown were hanged side by side near the ranch building and labeled with the committee's warning.

Plummer now believed that he saw a hole through the spreading line of vigilants and with Stinson and Ray made a dash to Bannack City. The vigilants at Bannack had just arrested John Wagner when they received word from the Virginia City vigilants to stop the sheriff and his two men.

The trio were caught shortly after entering town and quickly hanged. Wagner, or Dutch John as he was commonly known, followed them.

"*Stick up your hands, sir! You're wanted in Virginia City!*"

This command was heard on stage road and lonely trail, in deep gulches and at outlying ranches, at the door of isolated cabins and in the busy street. By the middle of January the Virginia City Vigilants completed the work of purging the town by arresting Boone Helm, Frank Parish, "Club-Foot George" Lane, Jack Gallagher, and Haze Lyon. The five men were stood in a row before the Virginia Hotel and questioned until each had confessed to crimes meriting death. They were hanged in an unfinished building on Wallace Street.

"*Stick up your hands, sir! You are wanted by the Vigilants!*"

The fleeing outlaws believed Beidler's middle letter, X, was the password for the vigilants. They grew to fear the little man, who was so marvelously quick with his guns that of thirty or more he personally ran down not one offered resistance.

Steve Marshland, found in bed at Clarke's ranch with both feet frozen, was hanged offhand. Bill Bunton was caught and hanged at Deer Lodge Creek. Cyrus Skinner and Alex Carter were rounded up on the Hellgate and executed.

And thus was the country combed and searched by various bands of the committee. Bill Hunter, who had managed to escape from Virginia City when Boone Helm and his pals were hanged, made his way to a cabin twenty miles from the mouth of the Gallatin. He was pursued through a terrible blizzard and captured. He had four years of crime to answer for. He was hanged to a tree outside the cabin, and in his death struggles he drew an imaginary revolver and gave a pantomime of discharging it six times. He was the last of the Plummer gang to be executed, although not the last of the rogues hanged by the vigilants.

At the beginning of February there were more than a thousand members of the committee with their spies in every camp and their trailers following up every suspect.

There was no longer a shadow over the gold country. Back in the mountains, up north in the timberlands and far down the Salt Lake City Road, the fleeing villains were brought to a halt by the dreaded words—

"*Stick up your hands, sir!*"

BY THE time the snow was leaving the mountain passes Beach Content recovered sufficiently from his long and terrible illness to walk slowly from Beidler's cabin to the Virginia Hotel.

He had missed the tragic events which featured the extermination of one of the strongest and most efficiently organized criminal bands that ever contended with law and order for the possession of a new country. Beidler had told him much of what had happened, but not until he had ventured from the cabin did he learn what an important part his friend X had played. Nor did he know his own standing in the community until he entered the hotel and was hailed as the man who had initiated the work of cleaning up the gold country by his adventure with the Fellows gang.

That night, after his first excursion abroad, he rested by the fire and said to Beidler:

"You put it on pretty thick about me. Reckon it ain't just square to Old Misery. He deserved all the credit."

"You're soft to think that after the old man's carelessness got you into that mess and nearly lost you your life," retorted X. "Lost his own, into the bargain. He made a blame big fight, but he shouldn't have weakened when you were within striking distance of help. You told things when you were out of your head, about standing double watches; of being dead tired; of being afraid of Frank Fellows' eyes. But that's all gone by now.

"And here's something for you. Just came in on the stage. I held it back until you'd eaten your supper, because I might make you excited and spoil your appetite."

Beach snatched at the letter and tore it open. He read it with sparkling eyes, and cried:

"It's from Dad and Josette. They're coming in the minute the passes are all clear. Be here probably inside of a month. I offered to fetch out the gold and let them have it to live on back East, or anywhere they pleased. But they've voted for this country, and I'm mighty glad. What we haven't got here we soon can have; and we have many things here we can't ever have in any other place. Only one thing that makes me feel bad—Old Misery. If I hadn't been laid up I should have gone to make sure he's sleeping sound."

"He sleeps well. I was through there, looking for tracks, on one of my first trips," Beidler told him. "I went out of my way a bit to see where the fight took place. I had a water-proof blanket. I knew where to look from your babbling. I took along the blanket for him. He sleeps well.

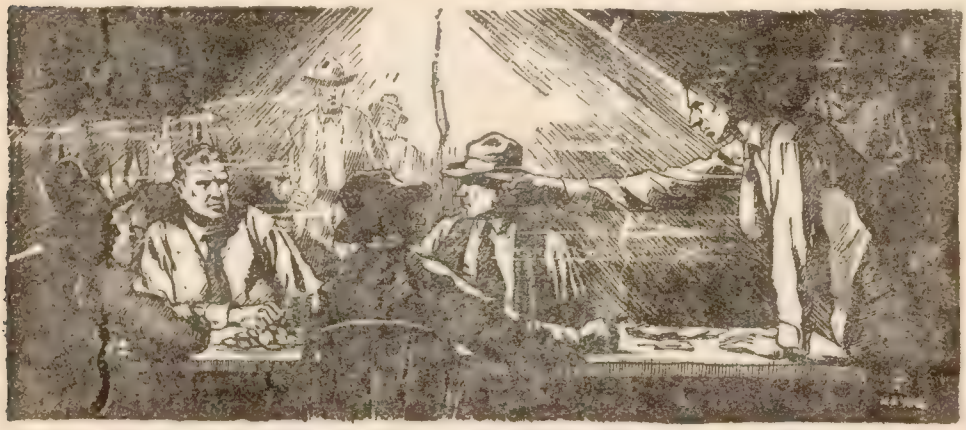
"So now let's talk of your father and your pretty sister. We must make plans for carting some new fixings up to the vegetable farm and seeing to it that the house is snug and weather tight.

"Soon you'll have plenty of neighbors, for more and more families are coming in this Spring to take up small farms and ranches along the Madison and Gallatin. And Colonel Sanders writes me we're sure to be set off as a new Territory this Spring. He thinks it'll be named Montana."

"Montana. That's a good name. Sounds Indian," mused Beach.

"Latin, I reckon. It means the 'Land of Mountains.'"

THE END



GAMBLERS' PREROGATIVE

by OSCAR J. FRIEND

RAIN! Not a sudden shower of light gentle mist, not a lazy sprinkle of great silver drops, not a tempestuous downpour of sullen, roaring water, but a steady soggy dripping that told of hours of rain yet to come. It was one of those spirit-sapping all-day rains that sometimes deluge the great Southwest in the Fall.

The main and, in fact, the only real street of Lebanon was a slough of sticky and deceptive mud. From Dallas Corner

to the river landing, a distance of twelve struggling and straggling blocks, one could easily have become mired down to the hips in many treacherous spots in the clinging gummy mud and clay. In truth, the street was so bad in wet weather that the mountaineers from the Ozarks, in coming down from their highlands, hitched their extra team of oxen behind their wagons to save the beasts for that terrible pull down the main street of Lebanon. Two teams of oxen could scarcely drag a single wagon to the river's edge. The wagon would mire down below the axles, the oxen would flounder almost helplessly up to their bellies.

Probably at the close of the nineteenth century, the Texas Hotel was the last resort and stronghold of the brothers of the cards, the running-iron and the gun. It was really a pretentious place, one of the five three-storied buildings in Lebanon, built of brick, and of fairly clean rooms and good food. Perhaps the irresistible attraction of food was greatly instrumental in keeping the hotel from being closed by the hardy ranchers and citizens. For, in those days, good food was a rarity. A chef was unknown.

Two men stood in the doorway of the hotel looking out on the plasticity of the street, watching the rain render it yet more impassable.

"What a rotten excuse for a street," said one. "Why didn't you tell me, Carter, that you had no streets in this forsaken slough? I'd have brought my waders. This weather will ruin the cattlemen's convention and, incidentally, our plans for enlarging our bankroll."

"My dear Jackson, we can not control the weather here any more than you can in Chicago," drawled Carter. "This matter of streets and rain cannot be helped. The cattlemen are used to it though, never fear."

"But, —— it, man, you don't expect to get a gambling crowd together, do you? I doubt if we can make a table to poker. Surely none of the wheels will be in use. Why—why, they won't even get drunk."

"My friend, you do not know this country or the men in this country. You——"

The bellow of a discharged shotgun interrupted Carter's remarks. Almost like a rattlesnake he abruptly ceased and glided to one edge of a window. Coolly he peered out and studied the street. His face broke into a grin.

"Come here, Jackson," he called.

The cause of the disturbance was coming into view, and the sidewalks were becoming lined with a laughing, good-natured, gesticulating crowd. Twelve teams of oxen were floundering up the street, tugging and straining on a great flat-bottomed scow in which were seven or eight men. The foremost man was driving. Four men were seated at imaginary oars and bent their backs in mock propulsion of the boat. Two men were firing shotguns at several strings of decoy ducks that trailed behind in the mud. All of the men seemed very drunk and they all seemed unmindful of the rain.

As the scow disappeared in the direction of Dallas Corner, Carter turned back to the man from Chicago—

"You were saying something about rain, Jackson?" Jackson laughed.

"I retract my statement. I believe I was mistaken."

"I believe so," agreed Carter. "All of those men are drunk and they all have money to gamble, rain or no rain, convention or no convention. You will not have made your trip for nothing."

"But just what was the idea?" Jackson was somewhat puzzled.

"Just satirizing the street—a campaign for good paving. They will drive on up the street and be arrested for breach of peace, fined, the fine will be remitted and they will be wandering free tonight with money to spend. We'll get our share."

"I am not so sure," chimed in a third voice and Carter and Jackson turned swiftly to see a lean, lanky, hard-faced man removing his dripping slicker and eying them sardonically.

Jackson, a medium size dapper little man with cold, hard, sneering blue eyes, looked mildly interested. Carter, the thin man of snake-like grace, looked slightly puzzled.

"I'm not so sure," repeated the newcomer, "just how much we *will* get off of that scow party—and that is the richest, fastest bunch in town."

"Why not?" shot Jackson crisply. "What's wrong? That is, if they want to gamble."

"Carter should know," responded the other. "Did you see who was driving that bunch of oxen?"

"Who? You speak in riddles, Tilby," said Carter impatiently.

"That was Bill Montague himself—the big man of his section of country—and you know Bill," announced Tilby tersely.

"I am very much afraid I do not have that honor," said Jackson puzzledly. "Who is Bill Montague and what about him?"

"C'm'on up to my room and I'll tell you," replied Tilby.

OVER a bottle and three little glasses, Tilby became very communicative and, with an occasional emphatic comment from Carter, enlightened the gambler from Chicago.

"Bill Montague," said Tilby, "is an old settler in this country. He first came here as a plain gambler. That was before my time, but they said that he played a hard, square game. More than one crooked gambler either left town of his own volition after playing with Bill Montague or was carried out in a pine box. I don't know about that. But I do know that Bill Montague quit the cards years ago and turned to cattle raising. He is one of the wealthiest men of the Southwest.

"His place is south of here. He comes to town once in a while with some of his men and they have a round of drinks. He tells his men to go slow and stay out of trouble. Then he tends to what business brought him to town, talks politics and civic improvements, and mebbe plays a little poker if he has time."

"He is a fat one for the killing, all right," approved Carter.

"But there never is a killing," objected Tilby. "He is too smooth for crooked gamblers. He plays a square game until he finds out the other fellow is trying to crook him. Then he crooks the gambler without mercy."

"He trimmed Tilby once," explained Carter joyously to the intent Jackson. "Tilby rung in a cold deck on him. On the second deal Montague suddenly lost his easy indifference and sat up in his chair. In ten more hands Tilby was busted."

"You say that he is an old-time gambler?" asked Jackson slowly. The two men nodded.

"He is very wealthy now and only plays for amusement? He still retains his ability, but plays a straight game?" mused Jackson. "Well?"

"Well," snapped Tilby, "if he sits in a game with you, you'll have to play straight poker."

"Zat so?" Jackson's eyebrows raised a trifle and his eyes hardened.

"Well, supposing I do play a straight game, what about it?"

"You won't win any money," said Tilby bluntly. "Montague will win and he won't let anybody lose too much."

Jackson threw back his head and laughed. It was a thin, wolfish laugh that was not good to hear. Even Carter joined in. Tilby scowled disgustedly at the two.

"You fools!" he snarled. "You have never seen him work. I am not afraid of him, but I know better than to try to beat him by crooked poker." Jackson stopped laughing and eyed Tilby a moment.

"So he is such a good poker player that you can't beat him on the straight," he said. "And when you try to crook him, he crooks you. Is that absolute truth?"

"Absolute."

"How does he work his magic?"

"With the other fellow's cards and with his own sleight-of-hand work."

"What sort of sleight-of-hand work?" continued Jackson, a grim smile making his lean face even more formidable.

"All the tricks of the trade combined with marvelous dexterity in card palming."

"Card palming? Small-town stuff. We had to cut that in Chicago years ago."

"You haven't seen Montague work," said Tilby significantly.

"Bah!" Jackson shrugged his shoulders in disgust.

"Are you sure, though, that he will turn crooked if he finds you dealing a crooked game? Are you absolutely certain? To what length will he go?"

"To any length."

"Doesn't he fear some of the other players might catch him in crooked work and brand him forever as a cheat?"

"He is too well known here, now," answered Carter. "Besides, he protects the other players."

"So he preys on gamblers," sneered Jackson. "A sort of modern Robin Hood, eh?"

"Only when they deal a crooked game," explained Tilby patiently.

"Well, what about it?" shot Jackson. "Do you want to frame him and get away with it? Would you like to get him and his money at the same time?"

"Does an Indian drink?" said Tilby bitterly.

Jackson produced a deck of cards and broke the seal. He riffled them beautifully and shuffled them dexterously, the two gamblers watching him with interest.

"First of all," said Jackson smoothly,

in a semi-singsong voice like a patent medicine man, "let me inform you that this is an absolute straight deck; it is unmarked in any way. I have yet to see the man who can beat me in handling a deck *and keep me from knowing what he is doing.* I have seen one or two better than I, but they couldn't keep me from following their work. Now then, gentlemen, I am going to deal a hand to each of us. Watch me closely, as closely as though you had a thousand Jewish doughnuts in the pot and I were Hermann the Great. Are you ready?"

He paused, and the two men nodded. Jackson smiled and flipped the cards about the table. The little pasteboards rustled down like a shower of leaves, so rapidly did Jackson flip them out.

"Now, Mr. Tilby, how many cards lay before you?" smiled Jackson.

"Five," responded Tilby promptly.

"Count 'em," suggested Jackson.

Carefully Tilby spread out the cards and counted six of the little pasteboards. He looked mildly surprized. Jackson turned to Carter.

"How many cards did I deal you?" he asked.

"Five."

"Count 'em."

Carter investigated the neat little pile of cards before him and found the same number as had Tilby.

"Rather neat," he murmured. "But then you dealt so fast you may have gone around six times, and we were too careless to follow you."

For answer Jackson spread his own hand with a swift motion of his fingers. There were but five cards there.

"*Rather* neat?" he sneered. "That is the best deal of its kind in the world. It can not be beat. Now that you know what I am going to do, suppose you watch me shuffle the cards and *watch* the deal."

Rapidly he cut and shuffled the cards. The pasteboards leaped like things of life under his incredibly swift fingers. It was like the rapid movement of some intricate machinery. Carter and Tilby were almost hypnotized by the action. They tore their eyes from his hands as he paused and looked into his smiling, cold blue eyes.

Then Jackson began to deal. This time his every move underwent a close analyzing scrutiny. When he paused again at the end of the deal he smiled derisively.

"How many cards have you, Carter?"

"Five," responded Carter promptly.

"Right. How many has Tilby?"

"He has five this time also."

"How many do you think you have?" Jackson asked Tilby mockingly.

"I know I have five," said Tilby decisively.

"Count 'em."

Tilby did so confidently. His eyes widened with wonder as he again found a sixth card in his hands. He looked across at Carter.

"Just a minute," said Jackson. "Suppose you had a pat hand spoiled by that sixth card? Suppose you were Montague and suppose you already knew the game was crooked? What would Montague do?"

"He would play the hand," said Tilby promptly.

"Good. You don't need to add that he would get away with it. I can see that that is your opinion, Tilby. Now suppose that you were playing against Montague and you *knew* that he had that sixth card?"

The eyes of Tilby and Carter met. A thin hard smile showed a glimpse of Jackson's even teeth as he watched them.

IT WAS still raining after supper, but the Texas Hotel was beginning to fill rapidly with laughing, chatting, boisterous cowmen. The gambling rooms on the second floor were receiving very fair support and the hearts of the gamblers were glad. The affair of the big scow of Bill Montague and his men was the chief topic of conversation. The popularity of the cattleman was beyond question.

Thus, at nine o'clock when Montague entered the well-filled rooms the playing was fairly brisk. There was a pause for a moment and roars of approval, congratulations and hearty greetings were flung at the big shouldered man who stood in the doorway, a quizzical, friendly smile on his tanned face.

Bill Montague carried the weight of his fifty-odd years with the lightness of a youth of twenty. He was still the hardest-working, toughest cowpuncher of his outfit, besides being a shrewd business man. His gray eyes were wide set and the wide mouth and long upper lip proclaimed the gentle humor and love for a joke. If he had ever followed the cards, decided Jackson, he had long since lost all the earmarks of the expert gambler,

except for the lean, yet tanned and rough, supple fingers.

With him were two companions, one a young man who was so nearly the counterpart of himself that Jackson had no trouble in placing them as father and son. The third man was a silent-looking, taciturn fellow whom Jackson couldn't imagine as laughing at any kind of a joke.

But Jackson's estimate was somewhat wrong. Jim Harrison was the strongest supporter Montague had in all of his whimsical sayings. He had been in the employ of the cattleman ever since Montague gave up the cards for the woman he loved and turned rancher. Young Bill was one of Harrison's favorite topics.

There were two poker games in progress when the Montague trio arrived. One, a full handed game of seven players with small stakes, drifted along desultorily. It was really but a pretense of a game to allow the players to drink and talk. Bill Montague glanced at the table and smiled a trifle in enjoyment as he nodded to the men he knew. The other game was at one of the center tables. There were four men playing. Montague recognized two of them as Carter and Tilby, two well known gamblers of indifferent reputation. The other two men were strangers.

The trio drifted about the rooms, watching the various wheels and card layouts; greeting the players. The central table drew them like a magnet, and they stood about it entranced as men will when they gaze on a game that is played silently and for high stakes.

"It's early," said Montague. "I haven't played poker since last Spring. We can't go back before day after tomorrow, anyhow. Believe I'll play a little if these gentlemen are willing. Want to play, son?"

"No, thanks. You and Jim play," declined the young man. "I'll watch a bit. I may buck the faro layout a trifle, later."

"We are playing for pretty big stakes," said Carter. "Still, if you want to play, it will be agreeable to me."

He glanced about the table. The others nodded, Tilby a trifle surlily.

"Draw up your chairs," invited Carter. "Thousand dollars change-in. Tilby banking. This is Mr. Blaine and Mr. Jackson, Mr. Montague and Mr. Harrison."

Montague and Harrison both produced rolls of bills that made Jackson's eyes glow. They calmly bought in and the game proceeded. All six of the men played careful poker and the game dragged a bit before they got into a stride. Young Montague watched a few hands and then turned to some more rapid form of amusement.

Blaine sat at Jackson's left; then came Montague, Carter, Harrison and Tilby. Through small talk as the game progressed, Montague gathered that Blaine was really a stranger to Lebanon. He had several thousand dollars and had come out to settle down in the country. He was a nice-appearing fellow, and Montague liked him at once. Jackson mentioned that he was a cattle buyer from Chicago, down to Lebanon for the convention and rodeo to meet cattle ranchers and to come probably to some tentative terms for the next Fall.

Montague's dislike for the polished and cold-looking Jackson was not lessened when he saw Jackson deal. "Gambler," he thought instantly as he watched the slender white fingers all but mold the cards in his hands. He set a careful guard on himself and tossed a white chip into the pot for luck. Harrison looked up, eyed the dealer for an instant and grunted. He had received a tip.

The luck swung back and forth and the time sped swiftly as it drew nearer to midnight. Montague was two or three hundred dollars ahead of the game and he was lounging back carelessly. Jackson was dealing again. He exposed the bottom card temporarily as he reached for a fallen match. It was the ace of hearts. The deal went on, the betting proceeded, Blaine and Harrison stayed for the draw with Jackson. Jackson picked up his hand and raised the betting a trifle. Montague looked on with sleepy eyes.

Blaine had evidently filled a flush or a straight and he was betting strongly. Harrison trailed. Finally Harrison dropped out on a stiff bet from Blaine and Jackson called the bet. Blaine laid down a club flush. Jackson spread his hand with a deft motion and exposed a full, aces over treys. There was nothing out of the way in the play, but Montague suddenly blinked. For one of the aces was the ace of hearts he had seen on the bottom of the deck. Jackson was dealing "from the cellar."

As he blinked and stiffened slightly, Jackson winked at Tilby who sat at his right. Montague eyed Blaine for a moment with

pity. Then he carelessly lighted a cigaret and slouched down once more as Blaine gathered up the cards with a laugh and began to shuffle.

From this moment the game underwent a stiffening. It was as if an electric shock had gone around the table. Blaine began playing as cautious a hand as a dour Scot, while Montague seemed to loosen a bit and he began to plunge just a little. Blaine's left foot became almost raw from the various tips and warnings Montague began to give him. And with all of his looseness, Montague began to win. His stack of chips continued to heap up before him. Harrison seemed to hold his own. Occasionally he would win a small pot on Montague's deal which would keep him safely on velvet.

Gradually the other games closed and a crowd began to collect about the card table. Narrowly Jackson watched young Montague. The young man chose to take his position behind Harrison, and Jackson breathed easier. Then came the big hand of the evening.

It was Jackson's deal. He riffled the cards casually, cut them and offered them to Tilby for another cut. Tilby refused by lightly tapping the deck in sanction of the shuffle. Jackson began dealing with his lightninglike shower of cards and Montague narrowed his eyes and watched the swiftly moving hands as a cobra follows the notes of the shrill pipe.

SLOWLY he picked up his hand and stared stonily at the ace, king, queen, jack and ten of spades and also the seven spot of diamonds. He had been dealt a perfect hand with an extra card. This was no accident. He had never seen Jackson before, yet Jackson was framing him. The only way such a frame could work would be for Montague to attempt to play the hand. Somebody had been talking to Jackson. The first crooked deal against Blaine had been exposed to him, Montague, purposely. Without looking, he could feel the exultation of Tilby. He knew he was alone in his deduction. This subtle study in psychology would be beyond Harrison. It was either play and beat the crooks at their own game as was his wont or quit cold. The very devilishness of the plot struck him, and secretly he admired the brain that had proposed it. He felt sure it was Jackson.

But Jackson would now be through. Who was to play the hand against Montague in order to get the cattleman's money on the table before some one cried "wolf?" Undoubtedly Blaine would hold a fairly good hand and come in for the plucking also. Carter was sitting next to him, an unstrategical position from which to play, but an exceptionally good place to watch Montague and to grab him. Thus, if Jackson were through, and as dealer and as stranger to Montague he would be through, Tilby was the only gambler left to play the hand. And Tilby carried a grudge.

Montague settled down in his chair with a thin smile on his lips, a steady, cold flame in his eyes. On account of that sixth card he knew his every move was watched hawklike. Blaine had been dealt more than openers for he opened the pot for one hundred dollars. The three gamblers almost held their breath awaiting Montague's decision, for upon his decision hung the success or failure of their plot.

The cattle rancher sighed with well simulated regret that he needs must raise a bet with such a poor hand. His sigh fooled Blaine, but the waiting three understood perfectly and they sighed also—in relief.

"Seems like things are about to break," drawled Montague. "I'll just have to hike the fee about five hundred dollars."

Carter tossed in his hand with a murmured, "Too much for me," and sat watching the play.

"*Cerberus*, the watch dog," thought Montague, but he continue to smile that thin smile.

Harrison looked at his worthless hand. He eyed Blaine for a moment. The newcomer seemed undecided. On the chance of filling his probably strong two pairs, Blaine might stay for the draw. Harrison shrewdly guessed that it had been Montague's purpose to freeze him out with his five-hundred-dollar raise. He acted as if he held a small pat hand. Therefore he was likely to stay. Without hesitation Harrison shoved out eleven hundred dollars in chips.

"Raise five hundred," he grunted noncommittally.

Tilby shot Montague's foreman a quick glance. Jackson raised his eyebrows in mild surprize. Had some freak hand come out unintentionally in that stacked deal? It was enough to give them pause. After the

hand was played and all of the money was on the table, when they exposed Montague's sixth card, the next highest hand would take the pot. If Harrison had drawn a freak hand that outranked Tilby's, the Montague crowd would get away with the money even though Bill Montague were disgraced.

"Do you pass, Tilby?" said Jackson crisply, sneeringly.

Tilby looked down at his hand.

"I call," he said almost hoarsely, and he shoved his chips to the center of the table.

"I pass," said Jackson.

Blaine began fingering his stack of chips. A heavy foot pressed upon his harrassed left foot. He glanced almost angrily at Montague, but the latter's face with its kindly but stern, expression stopped him.

"Too steep for my little straight," murmured Blaine, and he threw in his hand.

"I'll call," said Montague. "No use bucking my own side of the fence. Deal, Mr.—er—Jackson."

"How many cards?" crisped Jackson, his eyes glittering at the wordless implication of the rancher.

"These'll do," smiled Montague.

Jackson looked at Harrison.

"So'll these," grunted the laconic foreman.

"One card," said Tilby studiedly. He had regained the grip on himself.

"Blaine's out. Up to you, Bill," said Harrison.

"There is the makings of such a nice, fat little pot on the table that I can't resist the temptation of betting a thousand," laughed the rancher as he counted out his chips.

"Aw, you go to ——," said Harrison good-naturedly and he threw in his hand.

Carter settled deeper in his chair and half-turned toward the big man next to him. Jackson began gathering up the discards and adding them to the deck. The circle of watchers turned their eyes to the last player, Tilby.

"You must have an awfully good hand or an awfully good bluff," said Tilby slowly. "To back it the way you do, is breaking up the game. I'm going to raise you a thousand dollars."

There was a tense moment in the room. Poker history was again being made.

Montague looked thoughtful for a moment.

"This has developed into something big," he mused. "There's no use taking all night to bring matters to a head. I'll just make it worth your while to call me right now. I'll see your thousand, Mr. Tilby, and I raise you five thousand."

The big rancher was forced to reach toward his pocket to add bills to his chips to make his bet.

"Never mind, Bill," drawled Harrison, shoving his pile of chips over to the big man. "You done busted up his game, you two fellows. You can just use my chips, and cash 'em in with yours, Bill—if you win."

This action cleared Harrison's interest in the game and allowed him to devote his entire attention to watching the wolves of the pack—of cards. He gave Carter more than passing interest.

Tilby cleared his throat. He shot a furtive glance toward Jackson. The Chicago man's face was expressionless, his eyes were like granite in the North Sea. Tilby looked at the frozen smile on Montague's face. He almost shuddered.

"Here is your five thousand," he husked. "And I'll raise you, I'll raise you—all I got here in the bank—ten thousand, three hundred dollars."

For the first time, Montague seemed to hesitate. He passed his hand worriedly across his brow. He looked at his watch. It was after midnight. He studied Tilby for a moment. He counted his roll.

"Need any, dad?" said young Bill calmly.

Montague flashed his son a quick smile and shook his head. He drummed on the table with his fingers. Carter and Jackson followed every motion of his hands like synchronized snakes.

Finally Montague raised his voice.

"Attendant! Bring me an envelop."

Quickly the requested article was brought. Calmly Montague picked up his hand in plain sight of the men at the table and sealed it in the envelop. Placing the few small chips left over from his last bet upon the square of white he spoke again.

"Bring me a ham sandwich and a small whisky," he said.

There was a shifting of feet about the table, but no one left his position as he feared to lose it. There was no telling how long it would be before the play was resumed. There was no comment on Montague's odd action, right in the midst of an exciting hand. It was a gambler's prerogative to do strange things in a poker game. Men had

been known to place their hands under their chips and to arise and leave the building for an hour or more, the other players waiting patiently and honorably for the player's return.

Thus, there was no comment, but Montague knew that, under the existing circumstances, he did not dare leave the table. They would have seized him at once and searched for the sixth card they knew was on his person. So he smiled that fixed smile and awaited his order.

The waiter placed a tiny tray before him with the sandwich and a small tumbler of liquor upon it. Calmly, Montague picked up the sandwich and began eating it casually. He munched the food meditatively, frowning and then smiling. He became thoughtful and then his brow would relax. He seemed to be following a train of thought as he chewed. Suddenly he seemed to reach a decision.

Carelessly he tossed the unconsumed half of the sandwich into the cuspidor between Jackson and himself. Tossing the whisky down his throat with a graceful gesture and a neat snap, he set down the glass and counted out ten thousand, three hundred dollars. Shoving the bills to the pile of chips in the center of the table he tore open one end of the envelope containing his hand.

"I'll call you, Mr. Tilby. What have you got?"

Wordlessly, Tilby spread out four sixes and a jack. He eyed the rancher greedily.

"Uh-huh," drawled Montague thoughtfully. "I thought you had a pretty good hand. It is, but it don't beat such a hand as this," and he drew forth his five cards and spread them out on the table. It was his royal flush in spades.

There were murmurs from the watching men, murmurs of incredulity and of surprize as Montague started to rake in the pile of wealth before him.

"Just a minute," came Jackson's hard voice. "There are only forty one cards here. With Montague's five and your five, Tilby, that makes only fifty-one. There is one card short—and we started with a full deck."

"What card is missing?" asked Montague incuriously.

Rapidly, Jackson ran through the deck.

"The seven of diamonds," he announced.

"I accuse Bill Montague of cheating," said Tilby unsteadily as he arose to his feet.

It really did take courage of a kind for Tilby to make that accusation. There were no apparent grounds for the charge save his cherished grudge, and he took his life in his hand when he made such a claim.

Young Bill uttered a deep growl of rage and flung himself sideways at the gambler's throat. Tilby snarled and attempted to draw a weapon.

"Steady, son. Steady," came Montague's calm voice. "Suppose we let him prove his statement."

"That's a good idea," endorsed Harrison. "Prove it, you crooks. And you," he looked deep into Carter's tricky eyes, "if you attempt to place anything in Bill Montague's pocket, you'll wake up for breakfast in ——."

Amid the uproar and confusion which began to grow, Montague arose and said:

"Explain your statement, Tilby, and be quick."

"I accuse you of having been palming cards all evening. Your phenomenal luck has been too good. I have been suspecting you during the entire game. Now I accuse you of having the seven of diamonds in your possession."

"Search him," snapped Jackson. "If true, hanging's too good for him. I hate a crook."

"So I have noticed," drawled Montague. "Well, I am willing to be searched. It grows late. Appoint your searchers and do it quick. If you are wrong, you know what to expect."

Tilby paled a trifle. Jackson and Carter smiled derisively. "That's a good front he puts up," sneered Carter. "Let's get busy."

"Anybody will do, except Harrison and young Montague," said Jackson. "Search him, Blaine. You men behind him, search him. If Tilby is wrong, I will apologize."

As Montague smiled so good-naturedly at the doubtful ones, they began to go through his clothes with muttered words of apology. As they all but turned him inside out without finding anything of an incriminating nature upon him, Jackson arose and joined in the search. Montague's boots, hat, underclothing, all of his wearing apparel was fruitlessly searched. His chair, his side of the table, the floor about him were all examined without avail.

At last the searchers desisted. With that same frozen smile, Montague rearranged his clothes and shoved the chips over to the now white-faced Tilby.

"Cash 'em," said the rancher tersely.

Tremblingly, the gambler counted the chips and redeemed them. Then, with somewhat more than twenty thousand dollars winnings in his pocket, Montague laughed mockingly:

"Now then, you dirty crooks, you need not cringe in fear, I'm not going to touch you. I merely must thank you for a pleasant evening in spite of the distasteful climax. I must thank you personally, Mr.—er—Jackson, for a splendid deal you have taught me. Blaine, come on up to our hangout with us. I think there is some land out our way that you'd like and which you can get pretty reasonably. Let's go, Jim and Bill."

LATER, when the gambling rooms were deserted, the three gamblers still sat about the poker table.

"This is a fine mess," snarled Tilby. "With your great plan you have broke us and made us stink to Denmark."

"I can not understand how he did it," said Jackson savagely. "I watched him like a hawk."

"So did I," said Carter.

"You fools," sneered Tilby. "Don't you know the hand is quicker than the eye? I told you you hadn't seen him work."

"The hand is not so much quicker when the eye knows the motion to be made," said Jackson very quietly.

"Here, here," soothed Carter as he leaned over to toss his cigar into the cuspidor. "Don't you two quarrel over this. I——"

He broke off and stared down into the spittoon.

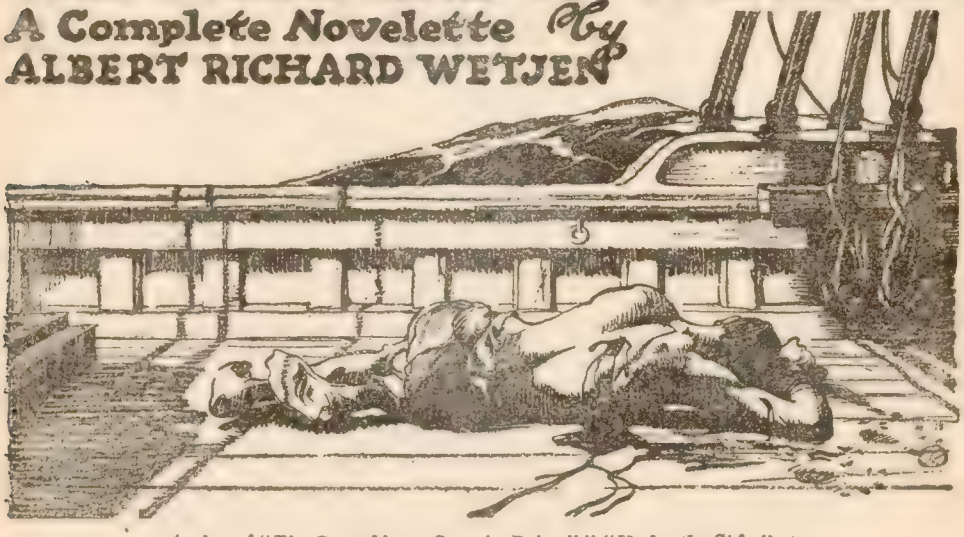
Jackson and Tilby watched him intently as he slowly reached down and gingerly brought up a soiled half of a ham sandwich. Very slowly he opened it before their eyes. In the middle of the sandwich lay half of the seven of diamonds, the ragged edges showing the marks of strong teeth.

"I will be completely ——," ejaculated Jackson.

"I told you you hadn't seen him work," canted Tilby bitterly.

THE TREASURE OF TRINIDAD

A Complete Novelette By ALBERT RICHARD WETJEN



Author of "The Courtship of Captain Driscoll," "Under the Skin," etc.

A SPECK in the vast loneliness of the Southern Pacific, half-way between the rocky South American coast and the low sandy atolls of the Paumotos, lies the island Roggevein saw through the tropic mists of a long-past Easter morning. It stands, like the monument Shelley's traveler saw in the desert, as a landmark in eternity, a cynical reminder of the passing of kings and empires and races. It is an island of mystery, of a thousand mysteries, unsolved and perhaps

"The Treasure of Trinidad," copyright, 1922, by Albert Richard Wetjen.

unsolvable. A monstrous stone riddle that has mocked the efforts of the finest intellects of the world to unravel.

Once in a while some young and ambitious philologist will take ship to Easter Island and peer on the vast stone terraces and the vaster idols of long-forgotten gods and men, that smile inscrutably over the sea and down the centuries. Relics are the unspeaking images, relics of a once mighty race that breathed and lived, and loved and warred, and raised beauty from the living rock to carry a message to the future. But the message has miscarried, for the unknown race has gone where all races go, into the womb of the Infinite, the workings in the insensate lava outliving the unborn sons of sons that were yet to be.

There are writings on the images, and doubtless they hold the key to an epoch that has gone. But no man has turned that key. In spite of years and the master-brains that have toiled over the carven marks, not one word, not one letter, has been deciphered, and the past broods on behind its veils, and will so brood until the key is turned and the scroll of a dead speech is turned back.

And the sightless eyes in the faces of stone watch the mighty Pacific thunder and whisper along the broad beaches, and the comings and goings of the moderns, as they watched the seas thunder in the past, and the comings and goings of the ancients, of armies and kings and fleets that are dust.

There is no history of the lost people. The legends that linger on the lips and in the hearts of the few island natives that now dwell among the monuments are maddeningly obscure.

"From the west came our fathers and the kings of the past. The Great King was he who built the terraces and the faces. We were a mighty people. And we know no more!"

So far the legends run, and in the last sentence lies the tragedy of the ages, and the glamor that was—

"And we know no more!"

HOW the partners, Ted Mathers and Wallace Painter, came to be on Easter Island does not particularly matter. The story of the arrival concerns an illegal gun-running expedition, a swift flight before half-a-gale of wind and from a lumbering cruiser of a once great power; an escape, between a dusk and a dawning, into the womb of night, and the necessity of an overhaul in some quiet spot before the long run to civilization should be attempted.

It is sufficient that one hot tropic day, while the Kanaka crew of the schooner *Mary Johnson* were busy careening her rotten hull before replacing some badly strained planks, Mathers and Painter took it into their heads to take a stroll ashore to the village.

Neither man was in a very good temper. When one has been on the verge of making a small fortune, only to be double-crossed by a greasy Spanish official in a little South American port, one is not apt to feel very pleased with the world at large. Mathers strode along the beach with head bent, his cold pipe clenched between his teeth, and his hands thrust deep in the pockets of his white duck trousers.

Painter muttered angrily to himself as he bit into the butt of his cigar and altered his monster strides to keep pace with his companion. The larger man's ridiculous little red mustache bristled on his upper lip, and he lifted a large hand now and again to caress it slowly. His big blue eyes were cloudy and sullen, and for all of his six feet four inches of height he looked like a sulky boy who has been deprived of his favorite toy.

" 'Tisn't so much the dough I mind losing," he rumbled savagely, "as knowing we were double-crossed. That dirty dog Martinez; to think of it! Wait till I get my paws on him."

"Oh, shut up! What's the good of moaning. We had it put across us fine. Some day we'll repay our little debt to Martinez; till then—why worry?"

Painter snorted and fingered his mustache. He considered his pride had been injured. It was his boast that no man ever put anything over on him and got away with it, and the thought of how he had trusted Martinez made him writhe.

The partners wandered on toward the village in silence. They strode past grotesque carvings of men and beasts, past low stone houses, each formed of huge squared rocks, green and mellow with the years of sun and wind. Over all brooded a sense of sadness and mystery. But the two adventurers had no eyes or thoughts for what lay about them. They were planning ways and means to get some money to

put them on their feet again after the disastrous gun-running expedition.

The headman of the village came to meet them as they approached the cluster of huts, and bade them sit before his door, while girls prepared kava to drink, and a lean-looking youth baked a sucking pig and some bananas in a glowing firé.

The headman met the adventurers on common ground, for he, too, had been a sailor sometime in his lurid past, and it was not long before the conversation drifted to ships and ports, to sails and ropes and yards. The partners forgot their worries in the interests the old man roused, and they even went so far as to tell him the reason of the shot marks on the *Mary Johnson's* deck, and why two men were lying still in bandages, how they had been wounded, and why.

The old man chuckled, pleased that the white men should treat him as one who understood. The younger men of the village would have crowded round to hear the sailors' talk, but the chief waved them back indignantly. The confidence of the white men was only for the wise, for a sailor, for he could understand and appreciate the niceties of positions.

A woman slipped timidly toward the little group before the hut door. Her dark eyes shone star-like in her bronze face, and the glossy blue-black hair she boasted fell low over her shapely shoulders and naked breasts. The headman looked up with some irritation and spoke sharply. The woman answered softly and pointed, and the headman rose to his feet.

"It is death, my capitans," he commenced simply. "Ah—that I should forget to speak of it!—there is a white man here, a man of great age, and he is dying."

Painter looked at Mathers with a start. Few white men had gone to Easter Island since the Chilians used it as a prison station, and what few had mostly kept their ship waiting for them, for there was no regular trade route to the lonely speck of land in the south. The two men followed the old chief and the woman across the village to a small, cool hut that stood on the outskirts.

IT WAS sometime before the partners' eyes became accustomed to the dimness, and then they saw a white-haired, wasted-looking man, reclining uneasily on a couch of soft native mats. A young girl sat at his head and fanned him steadily, now and then leaning forward and gently stroking the thin hair back from the flushed forehead.

Wild blue eyes peered through the gloom at the white-clothed forms of the two sailors, and a cracked voice whispered, the girl with the fan slipping an arm under the thin shoulders to raise the man up a little.

"Eh, mates. Howdo? I ain't seen a white man fer—fer a long time."

Mathers dropped to his knees beside the couch and seized the thin hand half-held out to him.

"What's the matter, old-timer; sick?"

The blue eyes clouded somewhat and Mathers could feel the fever-racked form shake violently.

"Sick," the hoarse voice whispered. "I'm going out fast."

"He came with a ship long ago. He has lived here as one of us for long years," the headman broke in.

The white head bobbed weakly.

"Aye, I've been here a —— of a long time. Say, you fellers sailors?"

"I'm skipper of the schooner *Mary Johnson*. She's lying off the island. This is Wallace Painter, my partner, and mate of the same packet."

Painter, who was standing straddle-legged just inside the hut doorway, took off his sun-helmet and bowed a little. He said nothing, but caressed his mustache with a nervous hand.

"Listen, skipper," wheezed the dying man.

His ragged beard swept Mathers' lapel, as he clawed himself up and flung a bony arm round the broad shoulders of the sailor.

"I'm Jimmy Travenor. Born—Lunnon, 1820—lumme, I ferget. But I sailed th' old *Thermopylæ*, was her fust bos'n— Say, I wanta be buried at sea. I've lived wi' her all me life, an' I wanta go back. I'm booked for Davy Jones in an hour or more. Will yer take me offshore and drop me with a hunk o' coal wrapped in an old square o' tarpaulin? I'll square it wi' yer, skipper."

Mathers smiled gently as he eased the old man back on the couch again.

"Sure, I'll drop you, old-timer. As you're a 'clipper' man I'll carry you on the grating till we are well out in deep water. I won't drop you inshore."

"Here, skipper, 'ere!"

The old man searched feverishly under

the mats and brought out a small square package wrapped in tarred canvas. He thrust it into Mathers' hand with a grim chuckle.

"There's my fun'rel expenses," he wheezed. "It's the goods, skipper. I oughta know, I buried it. Watch for the crabs when they meet——"

He stopped. Even in the dimness it was apparent that a pallor was spreading over his face. Mathers held his head. There was a rattle, faint at first, growing louder. The aged body stiffened, heaved up, and then fell back limply. The rattle died away.

"When the crabs meet—" came the whisper, and then silence fell, broken only by the quick breathing of those who watched.

Mathers let the poor old head drop. The native girl who had been fanning the sick man bent forward and placed her hand on his breast. Her dark eyes shone wide in the gloom. She dropped her head and wept.

"*E mate! E mate! E mate!*"* she whimpered.

The headman drew a tattered sheet of tappa-cloth over the rigid face and led the way from the hut. Mathers still carried the black-wrapped package the dead man had given him. He slipped it absently in his pocket.

"He had no papers or goods?" he asked the headman. That worthy shook his head.

"He came to us without aught save what he wore, and the little package. We fed and clothed him, and some of the young girls liked him. He was a great man in his day."

"Aye," responded Mathers dreamily, "he was a great man in his day."

All men who sailed the clippers of the old sailing-days are great men to the young sailor of the twentieth century.

"Let the young men bring his body with care to the beach tomorrow at dawn, and perhaps also they would aid me to careen my ship. I will pay——"

The headman drew himself up indignantly, and his old eyes flashed.

"I, too, have been a sailor. There shall be no talk of payment between friends. The young men will be on the beach at dawn."

He bowed a little and stalked away, and the partners wended their way back to the ship as the shadows of the faint dusk that heralded the tropic night came stealing over the faces of stone.

PAINTER came on deck at four bells, stretching himself and yawning. He shook himself like a dog and sniffed at the warm trade-wind that fluttered up over the sea rim.

"Br-r-r-r!" he muttered. "It's hot." He hitched up his belt, pulled on the lapels of his white jacket to smooth it somewhat, and, caressing his little mustache, wended his way across the poop to the tiny chart-house, just for'ard of the wheel.

Mathers looked up from the chart he was bending over abstractedly as his partner's huge bulk darkened the doorway. He laid down the compasses he was measuring with, and, pushing back the peaked cap he was wearing, scratched his head. A pair of rope-soled slippers, a white cotton singlet, and a pair of much-washed blue dungaree pants were his sole attire. Painter looked at him disgustedly.

"Any one'd think you were some blessed A. B., from the way you dress, instead of skipper of this packet."

"Uh-uh," Mathers grunted. He was used to his partner's personalities. The red-headed giant was something of a dandy, and even when at sea, on the little rotten-hulled schooner he owned half-interest in, he was apt to appear on watch as smartly dressed as though he intended to promenade through the streets of Sydney or 'Frisco. At present his taste ran to colored neckties, and the yellow atrocity he wore while remonstrating with Mathers seemed to leap out from the front of his white silk shirt and hit the observer in the eye.

"You can get below now, if you like."

"Uh-uh. Don't think I'll turn in yet. 'Sides, it isn't eight bells."

"As you like. What's the course?"

"Nor'b'west, half-west. Making Apia."

"D'you think it'll be all right for us to go in the harbor? We ain't got any papers made out for the *Dear, Dear*, have we?"

It should be mentioned that while repairing the shot-scarred schooner at Easter Island, the partners had painted out the name *Mary Johnson* and painted over it the name *Dear, Dear* of Suva. There was one fussy government looking for a certain *Mary Johnson*, and it was deemed by both Mathers and Painter that it would be well

*Dead! Dead! Dead!

for the schooner of that name to fade quietly away. Hence Painter's questions as to the ship's papers.

Mathers scratched his head for a moment, braced his legs as the deck heaved to the long swell, and gazed for a moment out of the chart-room door to where, beyond the low oak taffrail, a school of porpoises were gamboling. Vaguely he saw a huge patch of weed drift by, as the little schooner plowed ahead, then a turtle was seen and later a small squid, propelling itself by squirting water from a small tube it carried for that purpose.

"Hadn't thought of ship's papers," admitted Mathers at last, transferring his dreamy gaze to his huge companion, who towered above him. "But we needn't run into Apia. We'll anchor off the coast and I'll go overland to see Jimmy Driscoll, while you can keep the schooner out of sight till it gets dark. Then I can come aboard."

"Hum. Think Driscoll'll be able to put us to something?"

Driscoll was an Island millionaire and a pearl buyer. He was also a very good friend of the partners.

"I don't know. But I can try and get a cargo out of him. . If I tell him how things turned out he might be able to square up matters a bit. If he does give us a cargo he'll make arrangements for our papers, you can bet on that."

"Bury the old-timer yet?" put in Painter, after a while of silence.

Mathers, who had been listlessly writing with his forefinger on the chart pinned out on the bench before him, started and looked up.

"Uh-uh, darned well forgot all about it. We'd better drop him overside. I promised him deep water and we're on it now. Lord, he'll begin to go bad in this heat if we don't get rid of him." He jammed his cap firmly on his forehead, and reaching up to the shelf of books above the chart bench hooked out a service book.

"Come on!" Followed by Painter he left the room, and stepped out on to the poop-deck.

Four of the Marshall Islanders who composed the schooner's crew, kanakas who had been in the service of Mathers since he had first sailed the Pacific, were sitting on the main-hatch chewing betel-nut and talking among themselves. On the hatch beside them lay a long, canvas-wrapped bundle with a huge bulge at one end. A couple of "palms" with sail needles were lying on the hatch-tarpaulin, and a skein of twine hung round one of the kanaka's necks.

At a sharp order from Mathers the four natives went for'ard and returned carrying a light wooden grating. They rolled the stiff canvas bundle on to it, and carrying it to the rail rested it there while the skipper opened the service book.

A short service, a few words of prayer, and the Kanakas tipped the grating. There was a heavy splash, and leaning over the taffrail the partners saw the canvas bundle eddying downwards in long spirals, weighted by the scrap-iron at the feet, until it was only a gray shadow in the clear depths. A monster jelly fish floated by, then another and another. The schooner was plowing through acres of them.

'So-long, old-timer," whispered Mathers, as he straightened to the deck again.

He was thinking of the clipper days, of the *Cutty Sark* and the old *Thermopylæ*. The words he muttered were his tribute to the old sailor he had just buried. The service meant nothing. Neither Painter nor he were religious men. The service was read as a matter of custom.

It was not till the end of the first dog-watch that afternoon, when the large-eyed, lithe-limbed Kanaka steward was serving supper in the stifling saloon, that Mathers thought of the package that was his burial fee, or as the dying old sailor had said, his "fun'rel expenses."

Mathers had flung the little canvas-wrapped package onto his bunk, and while listlessly eating some of the curry and rice the steward served his eyes chanced to wander in that direction, the schooner's saloon being a cabin as well, inasmuch as it contained the skipper's and mate's bunks.

He got up languidly and crosssed the thin carpet. Painter looked up from the three-month-old-paper he was reading and then dropped his eyes again.

"Fetch me a glass too," he called. Mathers stopped and looked round with surprize.

"What's that?"

'Fetch me a glass."

"What for?"

"Drink—I thought you got up to get the whisky."

"Uh-uh, that's all you think about. Get it yourself."

Mathers returned to his seat with the package and commenced to open it. Painter glared at him, fingered his mustache for a moment, and then muttered beneath his breath. He turned his head in the direction of the little pantry that nestled against the for'ard bulkhead.

"Tibuka!"

"Capitan!"

The steward came running. He was dressed in a pair of sadly stained and much-patched duck trousers, from the ragged bottoms of which his bare feet appeared. He was naked from the waist up, but he proudly wore a battered old blue peak-cap he had somewhere procured. Painter scowled at him.

"My word, you fetchum square-face pretty quick!"

The native grinned and showed his even teeth. The whites of his eyes flashed as he rolled them upward to the deckhead. Then he darted away to the locker and returned with two glasses and a dark-looking bottle.

"One glass, boy. Capitan no drink."

The boy took the spare glass away, and disappeared into his pantry again. Mathers, absorbed in his task of undoing the package, saw nothing and heard nothing of the by-play.

With his sheath knife he slit the tarred canvas, to reveal a hand-made oblong wooden box. The hinges of the lid had been made of wire, and he noted that the lid itself was secured by three strands of copper wire twisted tight. Turning the box over curiously he saw a few words cut into the front side. He twisted his head to see better, and read—

Sail For South Trinidad.

"See this?" Mathers glanced up, noticed Painter with a glass to his lips, and automatically groped for the glass he expected to find by his own plate.

"Where's mine?" he demanded of his partner. The little red mustache bristled, and the blue eyes glowed with enjoyment.

"Huh, that's all you think of. Get it yourself!"

Mathers glowered wrathfully at the giant opposite him and snorted.

"Uh-uh, clever, aren't you? . . . Tibuka! Square-face!" The steward ran from the pantry to obey the white man's order.

"Here, see this!" Roughly Mathers jerked the little wooden box across to the other.

Painter examined the wording minutely and passed the box back.

"Looks as though we're on the track of some mystery, what?" he said without interest.

There was a sudden flapping of canvas on deck, the deck pitched a little, and both men, glancing quickly at the little compass fixed in the deckhead, jumped to their feet.

"I bet that's the Simp steering," observed Painter scornfully.

Mathers dropped the little box upon the table and made for the companion leading to the deck.

"That fool'll rip every stitch of canvas we've got aboard," he flung back as he went up three steps at a time.

Painter reached over and rescued the little box from the wetness of a coffee cup, and wiped it in his handkerchief. He began to feel curious to see what was inside it. He pulled out his sheath-knife and pried under the wire. It was easy to cut through, and it was not long before the three copper strands were apart. Through the open skylight he could hear Mathers swearing at the Kanaka named Simp, in three different languages. The deck pitched a little, the slatting of canvas ceased, and the needle of the deckhead compass showed that the schooner lay over on her course once more. The sound of swearing ceased and presently Mathers' slippers could be heard flapping down the companion.

"WELL I'll be ——" gasped Painter, as he opened the box lid and peered within. Mathers came round and looked over his shoulder, one hand ruffling the giant's glossily smooth red hair. For once there was no indignant protest as to his partner's manners.

Lying snugly in a nest of finest silk was a whale's tooth. Originally of creamy ivory, some two inches across the base and rising to a curving point, the great tooth of the little killer whale had turned purple and gold with age. In the Line Islands, and in the islands of the north such a tooth is a mighty treasure. Wars have been fought over such.

"Whew! What a beaut'!" Painter gasped.

"Some tooth all right. But what's that beneath it?"

Painter lifted the tooth out and laid it on the table. Pressed into the silk at the bottom of the indented mark where the tooth had lain, was a rope of pearls. Painter picked them up delicately and spread them over his palm. Both men examined them with the eyes of experts.

"Flawless. Worth anything up to ten thousand dollars," was Mathers' final judgment. Painter snorted and shook his head.

"You're crazy. They're worth twice that."

"Maybe."

Mathers reached down and picked up the whale's tooth again. He carried it to the skylight and examined it with care. It was in his mind that there was some mystery here which he could not for the moment fathom. Why should a rope of valuable pearls and a whale's tooth be packed away together? Why should the old sailor remain on lonely Easter Island when he was possessed of so much wealth? Why were the words, "Sail For South Trinidad," inscribed on the front of the box? Now he came to think of it, too, why did the dying sailor talk about having buried something, about crabs meeting, and other mysterious things?

"There's something in this we don't understand," Mathers said slowly, still turning the whale's tooth in his hands. Painter, gazing fascinatedly at the pearls, agreed with him.

"I understand enough that we don't have to make Apia now for a cargo. The money we get for these will put us on our feet again. But, as you say, there's something darned queer about it all."

"——"

"Eh?"

"Well, I'll be ——"

"What'smatter?"

"Cut. Something inside."

"Gone crazy?"

"Look here, Wally, this blessed tooth's been cut and joined together again! It strikes me we're on the track of something big. That old-timer wasn't romancing after all!"

Painter jumped up, and slipping the pearls in his pocket he joined his excited partner beneath the skylight. There was a faint line running completely 'round the tooth about half-way between the point and the base. Mathers endeavored to twist the two halves, but his fingers were not strong enough.

"Let me in on it," grunted Painter, and the giant reached for the tooth. Even his powerful fingers were checked for a while, but presently the top half grated a little on the bottom.

"She's moving!"

With a final twist the tooth came into two complete halves and lay in Painter's white-pressed palms. The tooth had evidently been cut in two, each flat surface gouged out a little, and then fastened together again by some fine and strong cement or glue. So fine was the joining that only keen eyes and careful examination could have discovered it.

"Well, I'll be darned," Mathers grunted, as he picked up the thin screw of paper that dropped from between the parted tooth. After a careful glance at the halves to see that nothing else was hidden, Painter slipped them in his pocket with the pearls. He peered over Mathers' shoulder as he smoothed out the crumpled sheet and read:

There were only four of us got away from Trinidad. Shorty knifed Matthews in a row over the pearls, and Red shot Shorty through the head. The two of us, Red and me, agreed to split even, but we rowed. Red was always a hog, and wanted to fetch his girl in on the deal. I got rid of both of them. I don't suppose whoever sees this will care about the whole yarn so I won't trouble to write it.

I'm putting this in Red's whale-tooth for safety, and whoever finds it can have the lot of the junk we cached on the island. I would go and get it myself, but I'm old and there are too many questions asked when I try to raise some cash on the pearls to fit out a ship. They'd hang me, too, if they guessed. I wish whoever gets the junk would give some away to the Mission at Ponape, and tell Father Jerrold, if he's still kicking, that Bill Wassom what he knew is sorry for his sins and wants to be prayed for. The junk was cached on the island, and if you dig on the east side of the big rock on the south beach you will find out where. The pearls is a sample. Jimmy Travenor.

"Well, I'll be darned," Mathers grunted again. "So that's what the old-timer was talking about, eh? I seem to have heard that South Trinidad was a pretty hot hole some time back. Pirates and that sort of thing. This looks like the goods."

"Hidden treasure, what?" exclaimed Painter. The gold lure began to grip both men. Their eyes glistened and their pulses went a little quicker.

"If it wasn't for the pearls I'd think it was all a hoax, but as it is——"

"The pearls——"

"—and the old-timer dying and talking like he did. I think we ought to look into it."

'Seems a good chance to clean up all right. Wonder what sort of a place this South Trinidad is?"

"Seems I've heard it mentioned somewhere. Got a bad name. Uninhabited and all that."

The steward padded in just then to light the lamps, and Painter went to get an encyclopedia from the chart-room. He was not gone long, and returned with his finger marking the place in the shut volume. He read aloud to Mathers, who stood abstractedly smoothing the fragment of paper, and leaning against the saloon table. The compass swung for a while in the deckhead as the watches changed at the wheel. The tinkle of the bell came through the skylight.

"South Trinidad is a rocky, uninhabited island in the South Atlantic—about eight hundred miles from civilization."

Painter skipped paragraphs.

"Has a thrilling history as the lair of pirates of the Southern Seas. Seventy years ago it was the haunt of a band of men who used it as their base of operations for countless adventures, in which rich treasure was the prize of success, and death the penalty for failure.

"A great many sailing-vessels becalmed in their efforts to catch the trade-winds to take them round Cape Horn fell into the hands of the bold sea-robbers of the island. The cargoes of these ships were removed to the island, and bullion and precious stones to the value of probably millions of dollars remain concealed. There have been several attempts to find where the treasure is located, but none have been successful. The island is known to naturalists as the haunt of giant land-crabs, and of turtles as large as or larger than, those found near Ascension."

Mathers looked up as his partner finished reading, and nodded slowly.

"We're on a good thing all right. The way I figure is that this chap, Travenor, was the last survivor of the pirates. He mentions that there were four of them, but also states that they are now dead.

"He was scared, I guess, to go back to the island by himself, and anyway, he mentions that he was old and had trouble in trying to get rid of the pearls. Probably thought he'd be safely hidden from the authorities on Easter Island and decided to stay there. Had a sudden attack of conscience, I should think, from the way he speaks of the Mission in Ponape. We'll do what he asks, of course. We shall be able to afford to if there's all the money there the book says."

Painter's eyes glowed, and he ran a dry tongue acros his lips.

"Think of it, Ted. Millions to spend! Say, there'll be some class to us."

"Uh-uh. I bet if you get the cash you won't be satisfied. You'll be back at sea within a year."

"Rot! Just wait till I get my paws on some of the dollars. You'll see."

He hesitated for a moment, and the glow faded from his eyes. He looked round the tiny saloon, tuned his ear to catch the hollow throb of the wind in the mains'ls, and sighed. There was a suspicion of sadness in his tone.

"Come t' think of it, I shall hate having to leave all this. Hate to split up the partnership, old man."

"Uh-uh!—Uh-uh!" Mathers' voice was gruff. "You dear fool, we haven't got the stuff yet. Well, let's go on deck and see about setting a new course. Then, ho for the treasure island and the bottle of rum, etc!"

He tried to finish with a shout and a grin, but something had choked his throat. He turned and went up the companion. Painter hesitated a moment, and dropping the book he held on his bunk, he followed.

IT WAS the Kanaka named Simp who was the first to see them. He was mostly useless at everything in the way of seamanship, but he certainly had the best eyes of any man aboard. He was up on the starboard foremast-shrouds "rattling down" * when his idly-roving eyes wandered away on the beam and picked up the tiny speck wallowing in the long glassy troughs. A flutter of white caught his eye. and, his nimble fingers releasing the splice he had half-finished, he ran up to the top and shaded his eyes from the morning sun.

"Ship on the starboard beam," he shouted in bastard Samoan, and Mathers who had just come from below, having finished breakfast, jumped for the glass-rack and picked out the binoculars.

"Where away?" he shouted, after fruitless minutes of searching.

The Simp pointed, but from his lower elevation Mathers still failed to pick up

* The process of replacing worn-out ratlines.

the speck. He shouted for Painter to take the poop while he ran aloft to where the kanaka clung.

A boat, a whale-boat, leaped into the circular view of the glasses, and standing upright in the stern sheets, frantically waving what looked like a shirt, was a gaunt figure of a man. There appeared to be others in the boat.

"Shift the helm four points starboard!" shouted Mathers to Painter, who stood in immaculate white near the binnacle caressing his little mustache.

There was a volley of orders from the giant's lips. Sails flapped and blocks creaked. The bow came round.

"Starboard yet!"

The bow swung a little further, steadily all the time.

"Steady!" The bow hesitated, swung to port a little, and then remained dead on the speck of a boat ahead. The altered course made the deck roll where before it had pitched, and down in the little pantry where Tibuka prepared the white men's meals the dishes slid to leeward with a crash, to the Kanakas' great consternation.

The *Dear, Dear* foamed down upon the boat across the unbroken crests and hove-to to windward of it, to drift slowly down. Mathers did not see why he should lower a boat if the castaways were able to help themselves.

It took skilful seamanship to slide by the whale-boat without crushing it, but Painter managed it to a nicety. One of the Kanakas flung a heaving line over the boat, and the gaunt man who had been waving the shirt caught hold and heaved on it, assisted by two other men who rose up from behind the gunwales.

A pilot-ladder was dropped oversides in case the castaways were too weak to raise themselves over the taffrail, but it was not necessary, for the three men came aboard with alacrity. Mathers met them as their feet touched the planks and regarded them curiously.

The gaunt man appeared to be the leader. He was very tall, quite as tall as Painter, and his boniness seemed to be natural to him rather than the effect of his recent experience. A ragged brown beard covered his lips and chin, and his long hair was matted over his eyes, eyes that were cold gray. He was attired like the other two men, in a cotton singlet, salt-stained and threadbare, and a pair of blue serge trousers. There was a bowie-knife stuck in his leather French-sennit belt, and he had a habit of fingering the haft in a manner suggestive of his pulling it suddenly forth.

Of the other two men one was a stocky, scarred individual who answered to the name of "Bluey," and the other was a slim, well-built young man with a silky black mustache, warm brown eyes, and an exceedingly courteous manner. He was called "Rasmus" by his companions, and the gaunt one went by the name of "Slim." It was by these three names that the castaways introduced themselves, and though they were plainly nicknames Mathers did not think it his business to ask for their real "monickers."

All three men did not look as though they had suffered much from their plight. They were somewhat sun-blistered, but they had evidently fed well, and Mathers saw when he had the whale-boat hoisted aboard that it was well stocked with both food and water.

"Been adrift long, Mr. Slim?" asked Mathers politely. The gaunt one nodded.

"Ten days." His voice was somewhat shrill.

"Ten days," repeated Bluey hoarsely.

"Exactly," observed Rasmus, raising his hand to caress his mustache.

Painter, who stood near and was in the very act of doing the same thing, dropped his hand hurriedly and with a vague trace of irritation. Rasmus smiled pleasantly as he noticed the motion.

Mathers keenly eyed one man after another and then turned on his heel.

"Better come below and get something to drink," he suggested, and the three rescued men followed him.

Painter watched them disappear down the saloon companion with his partner, and a worried expression settled between his brows. It was inconvenient to have strangers aboard at that precise time. It would make treasure-hunting awkward. Besides, the three strangers looked like tough characters.

Half an hour later Mathers came up on the poop buckling a cartridge-belt round his waist. Painter left the for'ard taffrail and crossed toward him, eyeing the heavy holster with surprize.

" 'Smatter? Going raiding?"

Mathers shook his head seriously, and

diving into his sagging right-hand pocket he brought out another belt and holster.

"Here, put these on."

Painter complied in silence. He knew his partner seldom jested. He also had great faith in his partner's brains. Too long had he sailed with the quiet and melancholy Englishman not to know who was boss in difficult places.

Mathers drew his partner out of earshot of the saloon skylight and explained—

"Got any idea who those three fellows are?"

"I'm not sure, but it seems to me I've heard of a tough character answering to that tall guy's description."

"What was he called?"

"Slim Wilson."

"That's Slim, that tall guy. I had him pointed out to me once in Ladrone. Listen, Walley, we've got to keep our eyes open. I took the three of them down to give them a little shot and sat them at the table. I wandered away to get hold of Tibuka and when I returned they were reading that darned paper we got from the tooth. I left it on the table and clean forgot it. They joked about it to me, and seemed to have come to some understanding amongst themselves.

" 'Where bound for, skipper?' says Slim. 'South Trinidad,' I answered before I remembered what I was saying. 'Going treasure-hunting, eh?' he laughed, holding up the paper before my eyes. The others laughed too as I snatched the paper from him. I said something, I don't remember what, and poured out the drinks. But all the time that Slim kept looking at me and handling that confounded knife he wears. Another thing. I see that guy Rasmus has got the same darned silly habit you have of playing with that fringe of grass he wears."

Painter snorted and shifted on his feet angrily.

"Who are you digging? Anyway, you leave this Rasmus guy to me. I don't like him. Taken a bad feeling for him from the minute he set his foot aboard."

"Point is—" went on Mathers, taking no notice of the giant's interruption—"shall we put this bunch ashore first, or see the whole darned affair through with them aboard?"

If there was anything Painter liked it was trouble. He had Irish blood in him, he had been reared in the West, and he had lived his life among men who lived on trouble. Besides, he was red-headed. Resolutely he buckled the holster round his waist.

"We're nearly down to South Trinidad," he muttered thickly, involuntarily caressing his mustache," and I don't see why we should turn back anyway to put three guys ashore we were good enough to pick up. Let them make the trip with us, and just give them a warning that we can shoot hard and fast if it comes to the pinch."

Mathers grinned a little and scratched his head.

"Uh-uh, all right. I thought you'd say that. I've locked all the guns away, but we'll have to look out. Those birds are as keen on the trail of gold as you are, perhaps keener. They'll want a share of the loot, you bet. And they know as much as us."

There was a shuffle on the deck behind him, and he swung round at Painter's "Hush!" to face the three castaways who had come up from the saloon.

SLIM stepped ahead of the other two and fondled the haft of his bowie-knife. His cold eyes flickered from Mathers to Painter, then back to Mathers again, as though he sensed that the smaller man was the more dangerous. He shot a quick look also at the revolvers strapped round the partners' waists, and his thin lips curved in a sneer under his beard. The brick-red of his skin between the hair, spotted with blood-baked blisters, made him look hideous.

"What's the idea of packing guns?" he shrilled like a querulous woman.

"Yes, what?" echoed Bluey. It seemed to be a habit with him.

"Explain," demanded Rasmus, fingering his mustache.

Painter growled deep in his throat at the movement. He made to step forward. He thought he was being made fun of and his red hair did the rest. Mathers waved him back with an impatient gesture and faced the trio squarely, his legs wide apart, and his thumbs stuck in his belt.

For a long time he eyed them, his sleepy, blue eyes peeping from between half-lowered lids, and the crop of wavy brown hair he boasted peering from under the peak of his blue uniform-cap, tilted back on his head. He did not look very formidable,

until one noticed that the sleepy shoulders were very broad, and that there was a strange hardness that flickered behind the soft eye-pupils. Any one who knew the Islands had heard of Ted Mathers, and knew his reputation, and the three castaways knew the Islands well. Even the tough Slim shifted a little uneasily on his feet, though his hand never ceased to fidget with the knife-haft, and his cold eyes never wavered from the sailor's face.

"Take this as a heart-to-heart talk, Slim, Bluey and Rasmus. We were good enough to pick you up—law of the sea or I shouldn't have stopped after seeing who it was in the boat—and we'll set you down where you're near a ship-lane sometime. At present we're on business, as you've found out. Keep your fingers out of our pie, *amigos*, for my trigger-finger's been itching for some time.

"You know me, and I know you. I can assure you that my partner is tougher than I. We haven't asked any questions about where you came from, or how you managed to get castaway. I noticed there's blood on the gun'l's of your boat, and I notice that Slim's carrying a wash-leather pearl bag—" the gaunt one here clapped a guilty hand to his belt where a suspicious bulge showed—"but that doesn't concern us. I just want to warn you to make no trouble, savvy? You can sleep for'ard with the kanakas, they're quite a decent bunch, and you can stay for'ard, too. We don't want any of you up on the poop, or interfering with the ship's work. You'll get your three meals a day while you're aboard and you won't have to do any work, though I could make you work for your passage."

"You mean we've gotta sleep with the kanakas?"

"You mean that?"

"Disgusting!" Rasmus started to finger his mustache, when he caught Painter's eyes and stopped.

"That's it," responded Mathers cheerfully. "Now get for'ard. Maybe I'll send along a box of ointment for those blisters, and a couple of bottles of square-face for your thirst."

"You seem to forget we're white men," blustered the shrill voice.

"You forget!"

"Precisely!"

"Take your hand down, —— you!" Mathers half-swung round in surprize, until he grasped the situation and then a smile twitched his lips. Rasmus muttered something unintelligible and dropped his hand to his side. Painter glared. Unconsciously *he* fingered his mustache.

"I think you're treating us pretty badly, Mathers," protested Slim, and the knife commenced to slip from his belt. Mathers, whose foot was near Painter's, pressed on his partner's toes a little. Painter's hand left his mustache and dropped carelessly downward.

"Treating us bad," mumbled Bluey, and he stuck one hand in his pocket.

"Beastly," commented Rasmus, but he kept his hand away from his mustache and seemed to discover a flea in his singlet, for he sent his hand inside exploring after it.

The Kanaka Simp, who was still "rattling down," saw these things, and being wise in his way he softly clambered to the deck, bringing with him the marlin-spike he had been using. The Kanaka helmsman groped behind him for a belaying-pin. Whatever else the Marshall Islanders of Mathers' were they were at least loyal. But there was little need for them.

"Don't you think, cap'n, that you could take us in with you on this treasure cruise? Say——"

"That'll do! Get for'ard!"

Slim had never believed all he had heard about the quick gun-play of Ted Mathers. He was soon convinced. Mathers' hands were not lower than his breast when the bowie-knife flashed in the sun, but before the flash could descend the gaunt one twisted and fell to the deck with a neat hole in his shoulder.

Painter had not troubled to draw when Blue and Rasmus sprang at him. He gave a snort, sent Bluey and his suddenly materialized jack-knife into the scuppers with a sweeping back-hander, and then closed with Rasmus.

The giant's great hand closed over the other's wrist in a vice-like grip, and the shining steel revolver the nerveless hand let go of, clattered to the deck.

"Make fun of me?" demanded the irate Painter, as he put forth his strength, and, lifting the struggling man above his head, he sent him flying along the poop, to bring up with a jar against the for'ard taffrail. Bluey came clawing up the deck-slant with murder in his beady eyes and the jack-knife red in his hand with the glint of the

sun. Painter laughed recklessly as he went into action again, and with two well-directed hits dropped the stocky one unconscious beside his shipmate near the taffrail.

Mathers slipped his smoking gun back into his holster and scratched his head. He looked down at the pain-twisted face of Slim that glared up at him from the planking. One of the man's bony hands was pressed over his shoulder, and from between the tight-closed fingers drops of red oozed and trickled. The bowie-knife lay to one side of him.

"Uh-uh. Kinda figuring on some fancy work, wasn't you? Let me warn you again that the two of us, Mr. Painter and I, are holy terrors when we do go into action. Get up now and get for'ard."

The wounded man tried to rise, but fell back with a groan. The shock had been too much for him. Mathers noticed that Simp was crouching at the head of the poop-companion with a marlin-spike in his fist. Mathers smiled and called to the kanaka—

"You hittem white man?"

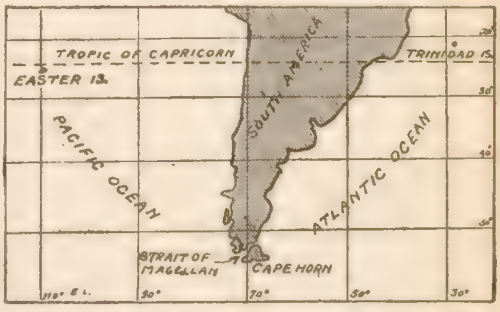
"Me hit stop along him, my word." The kanaka grinned relievedly and pointed to Slim. Mathers patted the bronze shoulders and told the Simp to carry the wounded man to the fo'c's'le, where he would live.

The sound of the shot had brought the rest of the crew to the poop. Mathers was pleased to see that all carried some sort of weapon with which to fight for him, and he pointed it out to his partner. A few short orders and the two unconscious men were taken from the poop and stowed away somewhere for'ard by the grinning Kanakas, to recover as best they could. Except that they still went about armed the partners seemed to have forgotten after a few days that the three castaways existed.

A WEEK later they lifted the shores of the treasure island. It rose like a huge mass of rock, spattered here and there with patches of rich earth, from the very floor of the sea. Rocky was the coast, and rocky was the hinterland. The *Dear, Dear* dropped anchor off the south beach, thankful it was the lee side of the island, for a gale happened to be working up from the northwest. The weather was rather chilly, frequent rain-squalls clouding the sun, and a hint of cold coming closer with the waning day.

Since the arrival aboard of their uninvited guests neither Painter nor Mathers had been feeling quite easy. Both had lost much of their heat for the fortune hunt with the constant strain. The old easy life they had led had gone, and they were forced to keep steady "watch and watch" on the poop, in case the three castaways made some attempt to take the schooner and the prospective treasure.

Slim's shoulder had been healing rapidly, Rasmus having extracted the bullet, and the injuries the others had received were no longer painful, though they nursed their memory. Since the day of their rescue, and the gory two minutes on the poop, there had been no word passed between the two forces of white men.



His Kanakas kept Mathers informed of the white strangers' actions, so that if Slim was plotting he had to plot very carefully, well aware that he was watched all the time. Yet there was something hatching, that Mathers knew. Slim was not the kind of man to take a beating easily, or to pass up such a fortune as the treasure offered.

The morning after anchoring, Mathers had the whale-boat lowered. He was rather doubtful whether to stay aboard himself or to leave Painter aboard.

He decided eventually to stay aboard himself. The red-headed giant was too quick-tempered to be left with Slim. If he were out of the way, Mathers reckoned, Rasmus would try to irritate Painter into a fight, then the three would pile on the giant and put him out of action. The kanakas would be easy once the three desperadoes had secured firearms.

So Painter went ashore in the whaleboat with four Kanakas, while Mathers lounged on the poop taffrail and watched him, and kept one eye lifting on the three sullen-faced men who crowded the fo'c's'le head for'ard and watched also.

THE beach seemed to be moving, heaving and writhing, and twisting as though alive, when the whale-boat came to the shallows where the surf broke gently. Great yellow and green and reddish blotches moved rapidly about, and a strange sickening odor filled the air.

Painter was amazed to perceive that the few trees the island appeared to support were white with sea-birds—frigate-birds, terns, petrels, cormorants, and even one or two small albatross. He rubbed his eyes and looked again. Even the Kanakas had ceased to pull on the oars and were gazing at so strange a sight. For sea-birds seldom, if ever, settle on trees. There were the cliffs, invitingly cool and secluded for nesting, there was the cool sand. But the birds remained in the trees.

Painter still had his head upturned when the whale-boat grounded, and he failed to hear the murmur of fear from the natives. He stepped out of the boat on to the shingle, and a powerful hand nipped at his ankle. He looked down suddenly, and could hardly suppress a scream.

The beach was alive with monstrous land-crabs. The yellow and green and reddish blotches he had seen moving about were bands of crabs. They were from six inches to over two feet across. As far as the cliffs, right across the broad beach, there were crabs. And now Painter understood why the sea-birds rested in the trees. Any living thing that came within reach of those powerful nippers would be torn to pieces. A native gabbled excitedly and pointed.

Painter reached into the boat and jerked out a stretcher. He battered the crab that gripped his foot until it let go and scuttled away. Then he looked up to see what the native was babbling at.

A fish had been washing ashore on the crests of the gentle rollers, a dead fish from the way it floated. It came nearer and nearer to the sand. A young tern, evidently not long from the nest, hovered above hungrily. It hesitated, and as the fish sloshed nearer land half-a-hundred crabs rushed into the surf to secure it. The bird made a determined dash. Both reached the fish at the same time, and with a frightened squawk the tern beat up, to check suddenly as though pulled back with a string. A long pincer claw had the bony foot. There was a flurry of fish and crabs and feathers and foam, lasting not more than thirty seconds, and then both fish and bird had gone. There was a little red stain in the water, a few feathers still fluttered upward, and some crabs scuttled back to the dry sand again. That was all.

Painter looked up at the resting flocks on the trees, and whistled.

"Losh, you must lead a life with this gang waiting down below," he muttered, then with a sharper yell, "Let go!" he made a vicious swipe with the boat-stretcher at another crab which had seized him, and battered it away. He jumped into the whale-boat and ordered it back to the ship. He would have to get his high, stout sea-boots to be able to land on South Trinidad.

Attired in leather thigh-boots, and with the kanakas adorned in many wrap-leggings of burlap tied with twine, Painter landed once again on the island. He carried a broken half of a capstan-bar this time as a club, and each of the natives had armed himself in a similar fashion.

One native remained in the boat to keep it off the shingle and prevent the crabs from boarding, while the other three, carrying shovels and picks, followed Painter up the beach, swinging their clubs vigorously with every step. The whole earth was literally honeycombed with burrows, and with every step the party crushed them in. It was like walking on a thin crust of earth, with a foot of vacant space beneath.

A curious rattling sound, rising ever louder, persistently, and then dying away to a mere mutter or rumble struck on Painter's ear. He looked up in the sky, all around, and finally on the writhing, scaly mass at his feet. He could not locate the sound. Was it some new horror of the treasure island? He went on cautiously.

He decided after a while that it was not one complete noise, but rather many small noises combined. He ran down one at the foot of a gentle slope that led up from the beach to the plateau-like mainland, from which in turn rocky peaks rose barrenly. On the slope Painter found a large species of creeping plant, with harsh-skinned, thick leaves, and thousands of large seed-pods, dried black, and containing dried seeds, some of them as large as marbles. It was the seeds sounding inside the pods when shaken by the wind that caused the strange noise so puzzling to a stranger.

Having satisfied himself as to the source

of what had bewildered him, Painter forged ahead through the crabs, striking right and left and warding off a particularly large claw now and then with particular care. It was not hard to locate the big rock mentioned by the old pirate. There was only one really big rock that stood on the beach itself, a towering, roughly pyramid-shaped thing, that came to quite a sharp point. A frigate-bird was resting on the point when Painter approached, but it suddenly fluttered off with a croak, and the white man guessed that a crab had been probing around.

With his pocket-compass Painter determined the east side of the rock, and clearing the crabs away he pointed out to the kanakas where the digging should be commenced. The east base of the rock was perhaps about thirty feet long, and to dig the whole sand up for that distance, for a width of possibly six feet and the same depth, would be a long job. Surely, thought Painter, the pirates when burying their treasure would leave some mark to indicate its exact whereabouts.

He commenced to prowl up and down the east base, while the natives were digging at one end without much idea as to what it was for. One of their number walked in front of them and to the rear in turn, to keep off the painful claws.

Exactly in the center of the nearly square east base, about eight feet from the sand, Painter found what he sought, a sign. In the living rock a hollow had been carved, a flat, square surface about two inches deep. The bottom had been smoothed a little, so that the whole looked like a sort of plate. There were some figures, graved fairly deep and rather crudely in the center of the place, covered with a slimy green moss that half-clogged them up. Painter scraped them clear with his sheath knife and read them aloud. "1 out, 2 right, 1 ahead." He smiled with gratification.

Wallace Painter was not a brilliant man, but no one had ever called him a fool. No man like Ted Mathers would have had him for a partner had he been. He brought his brains to bear on his problem.

"Now what does the '1' mean? Let's see, it wouldn't be feet, or inches or yards. The pirates were sailors and sailors talk in fathoms. *Ergo*, 1 fathom out, that's forward."

He paced the distance as he spoke, kicked a venturesome crab away, and swore as he shook off the loving claw.

"2 to the right. 1 ahead. That's here."

He called to the kanakas and bade them dig where he had marked with a fragment of rock. Then he dived into his pocket for a cheroot, and lighting it lounged against the rock and wondered what he should do with the millions he had coming.

He wondered why he could rouse no enthusiasm over the prospect, and probing into his being he found there were two reasons. One was the thought of the partnership splitting up, and the other a sort of cold dread that Mathers was on the *Dear, Dear* alone with the three desperate castaways. He wondered vaguely why he should be so uneasy at the thought of splitting partnership. It had been made as a working combination some five years before with the avowed object of making it simpler for the two of them to make money. Once the object was obtained the partnership would be void.

But something deeper than money affairs had grown between the two men. They had come to respect and admire each other. They had been in tight corners together, and had got each other out of tight corners. The partnership of business had become a partnership of love. Painter sighed vastly, and removing his cheroot caressed his little mustache. He wished they had never come after the treasure.

One of the Kanakas called excitedly and the white man roused himself and came listlessly forward. A million dollars in gold could not have aroused any thrill in him just then.

The native was tugging at a green-stained object that the spades had uncovered in the sand, not a foot below the surface. It was a ship's water-breaker, that and nothing more, tightly corked, and with the copper bands rotten with age and the dampness of the sand. It came clear of its bed with a rush, light as though empty, and the kanaka nearly fell backward with the sudden loss of balance.

Painter took the fragile breaker in his huge hands and shook it. There was a clatter inside, and a sense of relief possessed him. There was apparently little treasure after all. He dashed the breaker against the rock with a sudden savageness, and the staves flew from the grip of the rotten bands and scattered in all directions. A

little canvas-wrapped package dropped to the sand. Painter started as he picked it up, for it was exactly the same as the package the dying sailor had given Mathers on Easter Island.

He looked into the shallow hole the Kanakas had excavated, decided there was nothing more there, and led the way back to the whale-boat, his steps eager and quick, so anxious was he to get back to the ship. The crabs argued every foot of the way, and there was a great deal of shrill cursing and much club-swinging from the kanakas before the boat got under way and sped back to the *Dear, Dear*.

WHEN Painter had gone, Mathers sat on the starboard taffrail where he could see the three white men for'ard, and tilted his cap over his eyes. He hitched up the legs of his blue dungarees to allow his knees to swing the easier, and putting on the thin, blue uniform-jacket he had brought from below he thrust his hands in the side-pockets and gazed thoughtfully after the landing whale-boat.

The four Kanakas left aboard sat themselves below the break of the poop and conversed in low tones, while their lustrous eyes watched the three white men muttering together on the fo'c's'le head. A hammer-nosed shark slid in the wake of a huge turtle unnoticed; a brilliant blue-and-gold fish shot like a streak of colored fire across the schooner's bows, also unnoticed; and a dusky-blue frigate-bird settled with a squawk on the main-truck, though not an eye watched him. The minds of the people on the schooner were divided equally into two opposing factions. One was conscious only of the other, to the exclusion of everything else.

Mathers was troubled. He wished he had never been given the whale's tooth by the old sailor. It led to wealth, certainly. But it also pointed to the cross-roads where the partnership would dissolve. Mathers did not want to part from Painter. Although all his life he had been an independent, lonely man, he had come to love the boyish and rather plodding giant he had been with for so long. Of course, they might stay together even if they did become rich, but the old savor of the partnership would be gone.

Utter independence of each other, too much money, and nothing to do to pass the time would eventually lead to quarrels; perhaps even one or the other might get married, and that would be worse than quarreling. Mathers sighed.

The low hum of the Kanakas' voices ceased. The silence seemed to become tense. A chill wind whispered over the water and rattled the taut-drawn sheet-blocks. Mathers looked up with irritation, and stiffened. Slim was strolling along the deck toward the poop, his hand fingering the haft of his bowie-knife, and his cold eye glinting at the serge-clad figure by the taffrail. Mathers made no move to get on his feet, but his hand dropped to his gun-butt. He even smiled a little grimly as his eyes fell on the dirty bandage still tightly wrapped round the castaway's shoulder.

The Kanakas made no move to stop the gaunt one as he made to climb the companion, but Mathers' drawling voice came very clearly—

"That order to keep for'ard still runs, Slim."

The man was out of Mathers' sight for a moment, and then his head appeared level with the poop-deck as he slowly mounted the companion steps. Bluey appeared amidships and followed his leader aft. Of Rasmus there was no sign. Mathers noticed these things sleepily, as it seemed, but he drew his revolver just the same.

"Get back!" Slim landed full on the deck and stopped, one hand resting on the taffrail, the other on his knife-haft. His eyes were strangely twinkling.

"Aw, quit the fooling, Mathers. I just wanta yarn a bit. I'm sick o' talking to no one but Bluey and Rasmus."

"Where's Rasmus?" The gaunt one looked round surprized, and shouted to Bluey.

"Where's Rasmus?"

"Oh, he went below for a snooze," responded the stocky man indifferently, as he reached the foot of the companion.

"That'll do, Bluey," said Mathers quietly. "Stay where you are."

"What's the good of this fooling," wheedled Slim. "You think we want to get our paws on that treasure. We don't want it. We got enough in the pearls—we—we dredged to set us up when we get to some decent port. Why not treat us sociable?"

Mathers' eyes half-closed and grew hard.

He did not shift his attitude, but he heard the faint pad-pad on the poop behind him just the same. He gave no sign, until he saw Slim's eyes flash cold again, and then he ducked and twirled, and his gun spoke twice. The knife, intended for his shoulder-blades, grazed his arm and ripped open the jacket sleeve. There was a sharp, short scream, and a thud on the deck. At the same time Slim leaped, his knife flashing clear of his belt, and Bluey sprang among the sitting Kanakas with a short hatch-bar.

Before Mathers could swing round again he felt a burning pain in his side and a blow that sent him staggering. Dimly he heard the Kanakas yelling with pain and excitement. He wondered what had happened. Was he badly wounded? The red mists cleared for a moment from his eyes and he saw Slim, half crouched forward, his knife stained red and gripped in his right hand, his tobacco-stained teeth gritting through his ragged beard, and little red devils dancing and flickering in the cold eyes. The man was watching him straighten himself. Mathers had dropped his revolver and he looked round him wonderingly. His brain felt numb. He could not think. He wondered where Painter was.

There was a hoarse roar from Bluey on the main deck as a Kanaka drove home a wavy kris under his armpit. He had thought the kanakas would dodge a fight. He found himself in the position of a lone dog who has attacked four cougars. Sobbing out his life in a crimson pool he sank to the deck. The Kanakas spurned him with their feet and dashed for the companion. The beloved capitan was in danger. By the fish-god that came from the sea, some one would suffer if he were hurt. The blood of a thousand fighting ancestors was thrumming in their veins. The savage bravery of the "long pig" days was momentarily resurrected.

Mathers caught the sun-glint of the steel of his revolver and leaped for it with an oath. It lay against the starboard bulkhead of the booby-hatch to the saloon companion. At the same moment Slim sprang and raised his knife again. He snarled like a wild beast as Mathers, turning quickly, caught at the upraised arm and forced it back. In spite of his bleeding side he was still the stronger man. They fought cheek to cheek for breathless minutes.

Rasmus stirred and raised himself on his elbow. He put a hand to his aching head, and with a shudder saw that the fingers were blood-stained when they came away. Then he remembered that he had been shot, though apparently the bullets had gone too high to do anything but stun him. He looked down at his dripping garments and laughed inanely. It had been a good scheme of Slim's, to swim to the stern and take the skipper in the rear, while two men talked with him from the front.

Then he wondered what had become of Slim and Mathers. He sat up with an effort and looked around. What he saw sent him to his feet with a curse, gripping his knife and forgetful of his dizziness. He stumbled forward toward the two struggling men by the booby-hatch.

With a snarl of triumph Slim felt Mathers weakening under his grasp. He flung him savagely aside and caught up the disputed revolver. He looked up and saw Rasmus approaching, and at that instant the Kanakas arrived.

Slim did not wait to fight. He saw that Bluey had evidently been put out of action, and that the natives were intent on killing. The gaunt one was at the rail in two jumps and dived clear into the sea, the revolver in one hand, and the knife in the other.

Rasmus was too far gone with the blood lust to make any attempt to escape. He lunged forward at the prostrate Mathers, and hardly felt the swift-flung kris drive into his heart. He only knew a sudden red mist before his eyes, a sharp pain that consumed his whole being, a roaring as of many waters, and then blackness through the gulfs of which he fell, fell endlessly.

The Kanakas bundled aside his body and tenderly lifted their captain into their arms. They carried him below and wept when he bid them depart and leave him in peace. He told them to watch the ship and wait for the mate to appear. Then he weakly told the steward how to bandage his bleeding side.

LUCKILY no sharks were attracted by the splash Slim had caused in leaping overboard. He swam ashore with quick strong strokes, a stream of oaths coming from his lips, and hot anger in his half-insane mind. One thing, if he had lost both of his comrades and a chance to get back to civilization,

he had gained all the pearls for himself, and he was landing on the treasure island. Much might be done by a determined man before the schooner departed. He came to the beach, and for a moment he hesitated. The crabs surged toward him, and he realized his feet were naked.

Some two hundred yards from the shallows the first of the cliffs started. The crabs would not be so plentiful there. If he could sprint the distance he might get away from the waving claws. He looked back the way he had come and thought of the savage kanakas. Then he looked on the crawling masses of yellow and green.

He was in the shallows and the crabs were coming for him. A great claw nipped his ankle and the bone cracked. Slim shrieked with sudden fright. He suddenly knew that he could never reach the cliffs. He saw his death come upon him, but he could not meet it as calmly as he had dealt it to others. He wriggled to get clear of the great claw. Another slid above it and took hold. He had no club with which to beat the scaly bodies off. He pointed the revolver and fired madly. For a moment the advance ceased. Then he was down in the shallow surf, biting and clawing and thrusting with his knife, while the swarm of the great crabs flowed over him.

Great claws reached at his eyes. His throat was soft and tore easily. He emitted one last scream, and Painter, speeding back to the ship, wondered vaguely what the noise was. Then there was only a patch of red-stained water, a few floating fragments of rag, and some stripped bones over which the tinier crustaceans quarrelled. There were waves of crabs going ashore from the shallows. That was all. A knife glinted in the sand. A split wash-leather bag lay near it. Pearls shone through the foam, and from the eddies.

THE first thing Painter saw as he clambered over the taffrail was a deep stream of crimson, rapidly congealing in the scuppers. His astonished eyes, followed it up, saw the huddled form of Bluey at the break of the poop. With a suddenly tightening jaw Painter jerked out his revolver, called the kanakas from the boat, and went up on the poop.

Rasmus lay nearly at the top of the saloon companion, and from under him, too, ran a stream of crimson, fresher than the stream from Bluey. Painter went suddenly cold. What did all this mean for Mathers? Was Ted, too, lying somewhere like that? He shuddered, and stiffened as he heard voices. Naked feet were padding up the companion. He raised his revolver, and the startled kanakas coming from below looked into the steel muzzle of a .45.

Explanations were rapidly given and Painter dashed below to attend to his wounded partner. He found Tibuka awkwardly handling the lint and bandages under the white-faced Mathers' direction, and he sent him away gruffly.

'Hurt bad, old man?"

'Knife—left side, scratch on arm. Feel—like ——, Wally."

"Darn those cusses! I see two of 'em's dead. Slim got ashore. Losh, the crabs'll see to him. He can't bluff them. Turn over—so— Lie still! Hot water, Tibuka! Square-face as well!"

TWENTY-FOUR hours later, after Mathers had had a good sleep and was feeling decidedly better, he sat in a long cane chair on the poop with his arm in a sling, talking things over with his partner.

Painter sat on the taffrail, in irreproachable white, a cheroot between his teeth and a brand new red-and-green-barred tie decorating his silk shirt-front. In his hand he held two halves of a whale's tooth, from which he had taken a message scrawled on a ragged piece of thick brown paper.

"Is that all you found on the beach?" Mathers grinned whitely.

"That's the lot!"

"Another note in it, eh? Well, what does it say? This is getting to be quite a treasure-hunt."

Painter smoothed out the brown paper and read for a moment. At first he frowned, but at the last he had commenced to laugh. Unconsciously he caressed his mustache.

"Listen to this, Ted. It's the limit." He cleared his throat importantly.

"DEAR JIMMY:

I guess you'll be coming back for the money and stuff, so I'm writing this in the hope you'll see it. Next time you knife a man aim a little higher. You missed my heart by a clear inch. Even Inez was all right after a week or two. You can have all the stuff you find left, and you've got the pearls anyway. We'll call it quits. I hope I don't meet you, for if I do I shall shoot. So-long. RED."

"Uh-uh. So that's the end of the rainbow. What's the note dated?"

"There isn't a date—wait a minute—yes, 1873."

"The fellow, Red, that Travenor thought he killed—remember that first note in the whale's tooth?—must have recovered, and so must the girl. He came back here for the treasure afterwards and left that note for Travenor to see.

"Sort of a sweet revenge. They must have been a bad gang all right. But I guess Red's dead, whoever he was, and the girl Inez must be dead or an old withered woman by now. The whole story'd make a fine yarn. Well, that's the end of the quest."

Then Painter said a strange thing, strange for one who was always planning what to do with his money.

"And a darned good job too!"

Mathers looked startled for a moment, and then he laughed.

"Uh-uh. Kind of simplifies matters, doesn't it? We shan't have to think about splitting up partnership, eh? Well, we've got the pearls. They'll pay the expenses for the voyage we've made and a bit over. We'll give half what we get for them to the Mission at Ponape, and the other half we'll split between us. What do you say we run up to Apia now and see Driscoll?"

Painter looked at the gloomy crab-haunted island, at the trees white with sea-birds, at the turtle-infested sea over-side, and he spat in the water. A chill wind made him shiver and draw his white jacket close about his chest. A few drops of cold rain spattered in his face. The sky was overcast. As if from a great distance he heard the dry rattling of the monster seeds in the black pods ashore. He shivered again as he thought of Slim. The rattling was like a skeleton shaking in the wind.

"Let's get outa here and go somewhere warm," he bit out savagely. "Make it Apia!"

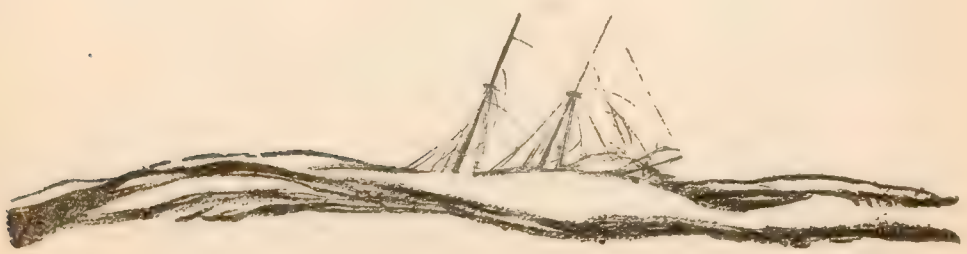
He pulled the string of pearls from his pocket and spread them delicately over his palm. He wondered what blood and rapine they had seen, what dark plottings in the sullen Magellan Straits. The whole world seemed to be eternally at strife. He glanced covertly to where the deck was stained, and caressed his mustache unconsciously with his free hand.

"Yes, Ted, let's get out of here!"

Mathers smiled gently and his sleepy blue eyes ran lovingly over the red-headed giant's face, sullen and almost pouting of lip, like that of a schoolboy who has been deprived of a favorite toy. From the cane chair where he half-reclined Mathers lifted his voice, cold with command.

"Mr. Painter, break out the anchor. Ho, there, for'ard! Make it lively! My word, you movum quick! You savvy sheets let go!"

The Kanakas grinned and sprang to life. Painter slipped the pearls in his pocket and stood up. A load seemed to have fallen from his shoulders. He was whistling when he went for'ard.



Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

THOSE of you who read "The Doom Trail" will recognize as its sequel the three-part story by Arthur D. Howden Smith beginning in this issue.

DON'T they ever die? Of course we suppose they do, but here's a comrade who wants an actual eye-witness:

San Francisco.

I have lived all my life in the West, Colorado, Nevada and for last seven years in California. I have had some experience around deserts, mining camps, etc., and come in contact with numerous "old-timers"—miners, cowmen, prospectors and adventurers. Have packed, driven, ridden and owned burros and in all my experience and in accordance with all the legends I listened to, have never yet seen or heard of a burro that died a natural death, from old age or disease. I have seen many which looked about to fall apart and were almost starved but with a few weeks of feeding they would take on flesh, liven up and give the appearance of a yearling. I heard the rumor when I was about twelve years of age that they never die and ever since have tried at every opportunity to learn of some one who has seen them die.

Is this only a myth to be classed with hoopsnakes, mermaids, etc.? Perhaps some of the old-timers of Camp-Fire will have a bit of light to shed on the proposition.—W. L. F.

ON THE occasion of his first story in our magazine Oscar J. Friend follows Camp-Fire custom and rises to introduce himself:

Fort Smith, Ark.

Comrades of Camp-Fire: Howdy, folks! I've been sitting back among the flickering shadows of Camp-Fire for several years but to-night is my first attempt to crowd forward and tell a tale to such listeners, among such singers of sagas and spinners of gripping stories.

THE present tale is based upon a real happening of Navarra County, Texas, during the early oil days. At that time *Bill Montague* was still in active gambling life. His name was Joe, he answered to "Jake." Ever after that episode he was known as "Eat-em-up-Jake."

The episode of the scow and twelve teams of oxen was pulled off by an old Indian-fighter and scout by the name of Mike Wallace. Mr. Wallace is alive and he lives in Ft. Smith. He has a veritable lore of information on the old days and I may some day be privileged to write some of it.

AS FOR ME, I am still under thirty—not quite old enough to be President—a *handsome* brunette, only twenty pounds overweight for my medium height of five foot eight. I was born in St. Louis, Mo. Spent a year or two there, a year or two in New York City where I fell out of a two-story window, turning head over heels and sitting down upon the cement walk, missing the spikes reared above a basement stairway by inches. My people are from Mississippi, my immediate progenitors, I mean. I can not answer for the ancestors lost in the dim past. I believe I failed to mention that I was uninjured in my fall. (Some day you folks may be sorry I wasn't.)

We moved to Fort Smith in 1900 where I have spent the majority of my life. Due to various changes in the town, moves, etc., we have the honor of owning the oldest drug-store here. I am married, have been for nearly six years, have a baby girl and above all, I am fairly happy without being *too* contented.

Fellows, I thank you for your courteous attention to this uninteresting harangue, and I sit down with mingled feelings of embarrassment, friendship and self-consciousness. Anyway, I extend my hand to you all. Now, let's listen to some one who *can* tell a story.—OSCAR J. FRIEND.

SOMETHING from an old-timer about meaning and pronunciation of Spanish or Mexican words more or less used in our language:

Etzatlan, Jalisco, Mexico.

I noted that one writer was confused between the cowboy terms, "dogey" and "maverick." "Dogey" (doh-gey) was a young calf that had lost its mother, while a "maverick" was an unbranded animal not following a branded cow, say a yearling or older.

Cowboys adopted quite a few Spanish words. I will give some with correct spelling and pronunciation. Span-Mex-pronunciation:

Remuda—ray-*moo*-dah—saddle animals.
Caballada—cah-ba-*yah*-dah—a bunch of horses. (Cowboys say cavvy-yard or cavvy.)
Quarta—coo-*ahr*-tah—quirt.
Chaparejos—shah-pah-*ray*-hos—chaps.
Vaquero—vah-*kay*-roh—cowboy—buckaroo.
Jaquima—*hah*-kee-mah—hackamore.
Cincho—*seen*-cho—cinch.
Rodeo—ro-*day*-oh—round-up.
Reata, Lazo } ray-*ah*-tah, *lah*-soh } lasso, rope.

The written language of Spain and Mexico are the same but spoken differently—some such difference as between a Scotsman and an Englishman, a Harvard man and a Middle Westerner, etc. The Castilian lisp and double "L" are not used here or the Castilian sound of "E" as in "prey". The Mexicans pronounce "E" as "eh", also speak in a singing drawl, especially on west coast and in south.

Torero—tohr-rehro—bullfighter.
Matador—mah-tah-dohr—chief bullfighter.
Banderillero — bahn-day-ree-ay-roh — puts in barbs.
Picador—peek-a-dohr—mounted men with spear.

A bullfighter, "matador," draws from two to ten thousand dollars per fight, but has to pay his own men or "cuadrilla," about four men. Before killing the bull he "dedicates" it to some prominent spectator and takes an oath to kill the bull or let the bull kill him. He must go through (technically) as long as he can stand on his feet. No one of his men can interfere between bull and matador unless matador is on the ground helpless. A spectator entering the ring would cause a riot and the crowd would demand their money back. A bullfighter is an outcast or de-classed from upper social strata, and could never meet socially an upper class girl. A bull that charges and gores a horse must be killed; if one matador is laid out, another must take up the task of killing the bull, or "rain-checks" must be issued.

Have spent twenty-two years in Mexico, also in Arizona in '90s, Apache Kid time.—OLD-TIMER.

FOLLOWING Camp-Fire custom, Hubert Roussel rises to introduce himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine:

Houston, Texas.

Mighty happy and proud to say a word at the Camp-Fire, where I've been a silent and admiring listener for a good many years. The only trouble is the subject you assigned me; not much copy in it.

TO MAKE the best of it: I've been to sea a bit. When fifteen joined on a pot-bellied, sea-going tug whose skipper barred no job in the Gulf of Mexico and Southern waters that was within the law. Salvage and derelict work were his specialties. And may I point out in all modesty that in the catalog of more or less interesting jobs that of capturing a wild-running, 80-foot steel barge with a Gulf "norther" blowing should have a place? It's something to make you decidedly thoughtful. The tug was powered with a ninety horsepower gas engine whose flywheel cleared the ceiling by 3 feet. Barring this monster over put kinks in my neck and vocabulary that twelve years haven't straightened out.

Came ashore from this hitch hankering passionately for the driest of careers—say sheep raising. You fellows at the Camp-Fire will understand the rest; as with hay-fever, you only get cured of the water temporarily. I've been back, in banana boats and tankers, and nosed into some queer places between the 40's of lat. But at heart I'm a small-boat man. Would rather own a certain sort of fifty-foot ketch than the *Majestic*. Slocum, London, Ralph Stock are my high gods, and I've a globe-circling cruise mapped out that will come cheap if I grind ten years more to realize it. Learned some navigation in the Air Service, supplemented it later, and have made bow-on landfalls every try at sea, which means more to me than a million

dollar killing to the man who guesses right on the exchange.

In shore occupations I've run the gamut from tramp to court reporter, and have had one adventure: Asked four New York city editors for a job in an hour.

MY CHARACTER *McVittie* grew out of talks with a Britisher driven out of the Solomons by man-eating yaws. Some of the incidents in the story are based on fact, also.

Regarding the yaws, there's a sore more or less prevalent throughout the tropics, I believe, that goes by the name, but nothing in the same class for downright loathsomeness with the Solomon variety, as far as I know. I've seen the worst the West Indies can offer, and they don't compare. These Solomon sores are man-eaters. A pin prick will do for a start, after which the victim is in for a bit of unshirted hell, no matter what remedies he has at hand; and you can hear all the tales you care to of whites and blacks gone off with them. —HUBERT ROUSSEL.

THAT'S one drawback of our cache system—I don't always get two connected letters fastened together so they reach you at once. But I think Dr. Mullikin's earlier letter reached you some time ago.

As long as you are going to pass my snake-bite experience on to Camp-Fire you might add this to it:

A common remedy in Kansas and Nebraska (mid 80's) was to cut a cross (no religious significance) through the bite and pour liquid washing-blue into the wound. Another was to make tea and, before the leaves had steeped, apply the hot leaves to the incised wound.

Have never been able to get an authentic record of death from rattlesnake bite, but saw a man stagger into "Casino Joe's" place in Old Las Vegas, 1886. Claimed he had been bit, absorbed a big amount of whisky and died a most horrible death. When dead his boots were removed and it was discovered he had been bit by a large thorn. Imagination killed him. Sounds fishy, but have seen similar cases in surgery where people have died from imagination.

Another case. In the trench at San Juan Hill a man was shot through the hand and slapped, by reflex movement, the man next to him on the face and side of neck. The unwounded man died on the way to the dressing-station. He was very bloody where struck, but not even a scratch could be found upon him.—LOUIS C. MULLIKIN.

As always, the magazine vouches for none of the snake-bite cures advanced—nor does Dr. Mullikin vouch for the value of these; he merely reports them. Every fellow has a right to his opinion on any Camp-Fire subject, but printing it doesn't mean the magazine either agrees or disagrees.

As to this washing-blue remedy. Heard it was good for bee-stings, tried it and had an unpleasant time. A similar sting a few weeks before was easily forgotten after the first few minutes. I'm off it.

SINCE the sting business comes up, here's something that puzzles me. Bees don't bother me (always except yellow-jackets, which run amuck without waiting for excuses) unless I accidentally grab hold of them, so I have practically no dread or fear of them. When picking cherries some bumble-bees kept flying around my head and I kept batting them out of the way with my hand. Finally one or two got into my hair—long, thick hair that sticks up—I scraped them out with my hand, asked my boy to pass me a shingle to bat them with and went on picking and batting. Hadn't even looked at them carefully, but finally I happened to get a good look, found they were hornets and got down so fast I nearly destroyed the tree. On the way I found a small hornets' nest, about the size of your fist, that I'd knocked down some time during my pickings.

Now why did those hornets let me get away with it? When you knock his nest down a hornet gets busy, very busy.

Another time was hoeing edges of garden, gradually approaching a very large hornets' nest on the limb of a tree without knowing it was there. Several hornets warned me by flying around me. Ordinarily when a hornet warns me that's all I ask of him, I feel he's given me a darned fine deal and I leave very suddenly. But this time I was asleep or something and kept on hoeing. Instead of stinging, they warned some more and one of them got into that same crop of hair (no hat on). Then I left so fast I don't know whether he merely left me or I was scared enough to scrape him out.

THIS was before the cherry-picking experience and I figured that particular hornet *had* tried to sting me but found the hair hard going and gave it up. But that doesn't account for his delay in trying, or for the other hornets' not trying. And it doesn't at all account for their forbearance in the cherry-tree. I've heard bees, etc., won't sting a person who's not afraid of them, but both times before it was over I had become very much afraid of them and still was not stung—a human can't run away fast enough to keep a hornet from getting him if it wants to. I've heard there are certain people bees won't sting, but I've been stung

by bees of various kinds (though never hornets) at intervals ever since I was a kid.

All very unimportant, but I'm mighty curious as to why those hornets were so patient and none of the people I've asked could tell me. Can any of you give me the dope? Probably most of you'll say the dope is that I'm a liar. But honest, I hope to die, cross my heart, etc.

LUCK to you, comrade. When it's a case of lost treasure I'm thinking a lot of luck is needed.

Capitol Hill, Oklahoma.

I have the description of a lost treasure some place in the southern part of Missouri, south of Springfield on the wilderness road. I have been all over the country, but I can not find the cave spoken of in the description to go from to where it is buried. This cave was known by the Knights of the Golden Circle and called the "camping cave." This description was signed by Dr. Frank A. Bush, May 27, 1863. Springfield, Mo.

What I want to know is does any one know of such a cave in Stone County, Mo., and what were the signs of the Golden Circle?

If you can be of any help along this line, I will appreciate it very much.—WM. WESTBURGH.

COME again, comrade Simms. Sorry so many interesting letters like yours have lain so long in our cache, but drawing letters from the cache is just an adventure and you and the others will know it's luck and not favoritism. Have sent your letter to Hugh Pendexter.

The picture he refers to is of course the one by Ross Santee—we asked you to guess from the picture whether the artist knew his subject at first-hand, which he did.

Butte, Montana.

Heretofore I have been satisfied to remain in the shadows and listen with appreciation to the narratives of authors and readers, but I can no longer keep silent and I will join your circle if you don't object.

MY OWN life hasn't been exactly "drab." At an early age a goodly portion of my relatives were wiped out in a feud in Kentucky and I was shipped to distant relatives in the Panhandle country of Texas. I think I was about four years old. At the age of ten I ran away and went to wrangling horses for a big cow outfit the next Spring. I was so small I had to tie an extra stirrup under the left one, as I was too short to reach it. We used mostly Capitan stock in that country those days and any old-timer can tell you that they weren't draft stock either.

I drifted about considerably for a few years over southern Texas, New and Old Mexico and Arizona and finally came north with an XIT for Montana. I went back to Texas, did a little work for the State down south of Langtry and came North again, punched for several different outfits in the Yellowstone, Powder River, Big Missouri and Milk River countries.

I ALWAYS trapped, hunted or prospected in the Winter, as I never could get the hang of a fork-handle and didn't like "hay shoveling." I was a "mess-wagon" puncher and hated home ranches, unless it be just to "sweat" for a month or so waiting for Spring to wind up.

I made a trip to Alaska, but didn't do any good and then knocked about looking for a frontier that didn't exist. Finally I went to work in a construction camp, building a railroad. I was a "powder monkey" at first. I am still on that road. I never went back riding. When the chuck-wagons went I was through, but would I like to see them back? I'd tell a man I would. I drove a twelve-horse jerk-line and four on a stage, hired as packer several times, used to have a guide's license and even tried to tend camp for a sheep outfit, didn't like either of the two last, sheep and tenderfeet are too uncertain for me.

MY HOBBY is guns and I like all kinds of them. I know a little about them. I have five bullet-scars on me; only one is on my back—I didn't know it was coming.

That man Wiggins makes a hit with me, especially when he said something once about a "45 Colt 4¾ barrel—loading gate—waist-band of pants," especially these days of screen gun-men who strut about the universe with a Texas "hog-leg" strapped on them right where they just as well might have it in their trunk. I have never known a Colt S. A. to go off accidental. They are the only gun which can be set with the firing-pin between the cartridges. Mr. Wiggins failed to mention that in giving information recently. I think that adventurers whose life is apt to depend on their gun should leave automatics strictly alone. I was in the last skirmish we and other nations had with the Central Powers for about two years, most of the time with the French Army, and saw a good many automatics used. They are a military arm pure and simple. I think the most powerful as well as reliable side-arm made is the Colt S. A. 4¾ or 5½ inch barrel shooting the 44-40-H. V. S. P., but I like the 45 better.

I have never butted into any Camp-Fire arguments, but I have noticed several things come up lately that are rather in my line, having to do with cayuses and "cows." It appears some Canuck brother took a fall out of our editor for mentioning everything that goes on a horse's head all at once. Seems like he wants a part of it mentioned—the "head-stall." There's the brow-band, the chin-strap, the curb-strap and sometimes a nose-band that we used for a single martingale—all these things when fastened to a head-stall make a bridle. Yes, I know over North they say "head-stall" instead of "bridle"—I've known it for over twenty years—but I'll bet if you were to ask the man that makes them he would tell you a head-stall is part of a bridle. My vote goes to the editor.

Along about thirty years ago some *hombre* got a happy idea. He figured he get rich off the numerous punchers of the West and their imitators. This hombre's name was Tackberry and his devilish idea was a cast iron cinch-buckle, which was guaranteed not to work loose. It wouldn't, ***not if you kept it***

tight, but the tongue would tear out and sometimes cast iron will snap, especially on cold mornings.

About eighteen years ago I was working for the LU (L. U. Bar) down on the Yellowstone and we were on beef round up, about to ship at Fallon, Mont., and we had the river full of slush ice between us and the railroad. Now cattle won't go in water when the sun is shining on it, so we always started them in small bunches before sun-up and if any one thinks he can swim that Yellowstone with a pair of "chaps" on he is plumb loco, and as a man might get dragged into a "mill" we used to strip to our underclothes. We'd hired a "pilgrim" a few days before and he was a "shadow rider." He had some outfit and on it a patent cinch-buckle.

When we started to prepare to get in that icy river the "pilgrim" refused to take off even his fancy chaps, but was ordered by an old cow-foreman (Mike Dodge) to loosen his cinch, this because a horse can not swim if he is cinched tight, and a Tackberry is useless when it is loose.

Within fifteen minutes the pilgrim's saddle came off in the river and his life was barely saved by him catching hold of my horse's tail. His saddle was lost; so was his job—some one had mentioned the buckle to him, but he didn't heed and he received no further advice—a fellow don't get much around a "chuck wagon" outside of what he learns by hard knocks. A Tackberry is bad medicine in any man's country. It is bad enough to be set afoot without lugging a saddle in with you.

ON PAGE 130 of *Adventure* Dec. 10th you have a sketch of a man riding a steer, with a surcingle; both his hands are out of sight, which shows he has hand holts, very likely two, and he has his spurs forward in the critter's neck, although the critter is plainly just coming down. If this man was riding "slick" he would be a goner, but as he is plainly riding by "main strength and awkwardness" he may get by. I have seen bare-back riders ride in just that way, continually scratching from "ears to tail" regardless of where their animals' feet may be.

In riding broncs or any other critter slick, one hand must be in air at all times; rider must not change hands nor ride on his spurs. These are contest rules. When animal hits ground it is well to have one's feet down and body well back in the saddle; there are certain kinds of buckers who will throw any man living if they get him up over the horn when they have completed their jump.

If the picture was of a saddled animal and if the man was whipping, I would say it was wrong, but as he is not and as I have myself ridden in just that way I will say it is all right. I wouldn't attempt to say as to the sex of the artist, but making a rough guess —I'd say a woman. Artists can easily make mistakes. I have seen a bad one by Chas. M. Russell, who is not only an artist but a cowboy as well. In one of Frederick Remington's greatest pictures I noticed a most ridiculous error, although he is a B. A. and his coloring is truly Western.

I WOULD like to add before I finish that I have read everything I could get my hands on about the Vigilantes of Montana and Idaho, for I am personally acquainted with many of them. I have followed very closely Hugh Pendexter's story, "Lost Diggings," and liked it very much although I do not think that Fred Patterson was the demon the story makes him out to be. But it was necessary for the plot and perfectly permissible. I am not complaining. Pinkham was killed in fair fight and I believe that friends of both men were to blame for the fight. Pinkham, morally speaking, was by far the better man.

It is my intention to write a letter later on and see if I can't get Mr. Pendexter to weave a story about some other characters of that period which I'll mention at that time.—PINK SIMMS.

SOMETHING from Thomas Samson Miller of our writers' brigade and "A. A." concerning the use of poisoned arrows in Africa:

Carmel, Cal.

There was a discussion at Camp-Fire about the Africans using poisoned arrows to kill game. I have often seen the wizards dipping arrows in poison, making "Death magic" preparatory to an elephant hunt. I thought the hunters were merely after ivory, but in two instances I saw the flesh dried for food. The wizard forbade drinking of the blood. Hence I presume only the blood was poisoned, the meat being taken before it could be affected. The blacks were very careful to drain all the blood and to thoroughly wash the meat. The wizards are invariably herbalists. The hunters told me the poison makes the elephant very tired and thirsty. If the elephant, after being hit by the arrows, strikes away from water, the hunters do not trouble to take its trail, but wait by the water, knowing it will turn back. My idea of the poison is that it stupefies the animal. One of my informants said it made the elephant "sleepy."—THOS. S. MILLER.

RECENTLY inquiry was made at our office for information regarding Gordon Young, the inquirer stating that a man of another name had for several years been claiming to be the author of the stories published under Gordon Young's name. The inquirer was referred to Mr. Young and became quite convinced that the other man's claim was unfounded. Personally, I needed no convincing. Naturally Gordon Young does not wish to be held responsible for the general activities of any man of the type to make false claims to another man's work and identity. I'm glad to state that Gordon Young sends us the Gordon Young stories, that when I write to Gordon Young at Gordon Young's address, Gordon Young replies, and that our checks are made out to Gordon Young. He has never assured me that Gordon Young is his real name and not a pen-name (any more than I've ever assured him my name is my real one and not a pen-name) but I have no reason whatever to suspect that such is the case. Even if it were, it would still leave him a different person from this chap who's been claiming his stories.

You'll remember that within a year or so some other fellow claimed to write Arthur O. Friel's stories, and that Talbot Mundy and various other writers have been annoyed by imposters. The woods are full of 'em. Think twice before you accept a man's unsupported claim to being a well-known author. Also, our writers' brigade are a pretty decent lot. Think three times if the claimant isn't a decent lot himself.

THIS is a letter I've been hunting for. You'll remember Captain Dingle gave us the account of his adventures. There was no mention in it of the incident given below. But it happened that two different men who had been on the ship that picked him up wrote in about it. Here is one of them—just dug out from our cache—written to Captain Dingle. I've already given you the other.

Jersey City, New Jersey.

I just finished reading a copy of the *Adventure* magazine and happened to notice your name in question and answer department and it brought memories of the time I was in the U. S. Navy, and we were about sixty miles out of Bermuda when the lookout reported a ship off the port bow, and upon coming closer we discovered a man, a dog and a sailboat who were traveling from New York to Bermuda. They were five days without water and when we gave the man water, he gave the dog a drink first. After which we towed him into Bermuda and then we found out it was you. So I would like to know if you ever wrote a story about it. I was a quartermaster on the *Niagara* when you were picked up.—EDWARD SCHEMBER.

CONCERNING his serial beginning in this issue a few words from Arthur D. Howden Smith:

Point o' Woods, Long Island.

In this sequel to "The Doom Trail" I have tried, first of all, to tell a story of adventure—you might say, about the healing, stimulating qualities of adventure—centering about three characters, who have become very much alive to me. It is also, I think, the first serious attempt to paint anything like a comprehensive picture of what the West was like just before the white men came into it for good.

IN MY data as to Western tribes, conditions, ranges, etc., I decided, after some investigation, to rely upon Smithsonian reports, inasmuch as they seemed most authoritative and the field of available information was very narrow. Of course, the locations of tribes, and to some extent, their standards of culture, habits, etc., were different at the time of which I write from what they were a century later, when the permanent Caucasian invasion of the trans-Mississippi country began. There were also differences in climate, largely because of the extensive afforestation—but this applies rather to the country between the Alleghanies and the Mississippi than to the Far West. It would be impossible for me to list all the books consulted in this work, as it required a very wide reading, picking up bits here and there.

The Indian psychology, I think, is correct, even the extraordinary incident of "The Wolf Brethren," if folk-tales go for anything.

The description of the Condoling Council at the end is quoted verbatim from Hale's translation of the Mohawk and Onondaga copies of the Book of Rites—considerably condensed by me naturally, as most readers would scarcely be interested in the entire ceremonies. I'll take that back; I think a good many readers would be. It's extraordinarily picturesque and impressive. But to save space it seems undesirable to go any further into matter which would slow up the story.—ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH.

LAST call for our annual vote by readers on the best ten stories published by our magazine during 1922. Voting is an easy matter. Any one can vote. Here are the particulars:

All you need to do is write the titles and authors' names of the ten stories you consider best, given in order of preference, and mail us the sheet of paper to reach us not later than December thirty-first. If you like, add as many as ten more for honorable mention. As in the past years, short stories, novelettes, novels and serials are included, poems, Camp-Fire and the other departments are barred out. The issues covered are those dated January 10, 1922, to December 30, 1922, inclusive. Serials only parts of which are contained in these issues are included.

We very sincerely want your cooperation and help in getting for *Adventure* the kind of story and the authors that a majority of our readers like best. If you know of a better way of furthering this cooperation than is the annual vote of readers, name it, for we are ready to try any legitimate plan that will help register your wishes in the making of the magazine. It's not only common sense to strive for this but it's a lot happier and more comfortable all around if people work together in friendly fashion.

WHILE the departments are excluded from the vote, we'll be more than glad to get suggestions for improving them or adding to them, but don't forget that "Letter-Friends" and "Wanted" have already been tried, and, though successful and popular, had to be given up because two or three readers abused them.

And if you have any suggestions concerning the magazine in general or any part of it, by all means send them in. I mean constructive suggestions that will definitely point out ways for improvement. Wherever we can meet your ideas we will, but remember that it is the majority whom we must please and that, while a given plan may please a minority and perhaps us here in the office, if it fails to please the majority it is not warranted.

But the only way to find out what the majority want is for the readers themselves to tell us. And you are one of the readers.—A. S. H.

VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES TO ANY READER

These services of *Adventure*, mostly free, are open to any one. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we ask in return only that you **read and observe the simple rules**, thus saving needless delay and trouble for us. The whole spirit of the magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we can help we're ready and willing to try. **Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.**

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you, *post-paid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

The Boston Magazine Exchange, 24 T Wharf, Boston, Mass., can supply Adventure *back through* 1918, *and occasional copies before that.*

WILL SELL: 1st March, 2nd April, 2nd May, 1st June, 1919; 1st Nov., 1921. Ten cents each.—Address MRS. J. MAYER, 601 West 179th St., N. Y. C.

WILL SELL: 1st Jan., Mid-Jan., 1st Feb., 1st March, 1st Apr., 1st August, Mid-July and 1st Sept., 1918; 1st Dec., 1919; 1st Feb. to 1st Apr., 1920; 1st July, 1920 to 1st Aug., 1921.—Address FREEMAN SIMPSON, Waterville, Me.

WILL SELL: 1st Oct., 1921; July 18 to Dec. 18, 1919; Jan. 3rd to March 18, April 18, June 18 to Dec. 18, 1920; Jan. 3rd to May 18, 1921. Forty-two issues at ten cents a copy, not including postage.—Address WALTER M. EVANS, 269 McLeod St., Ottawa, Canada.

WILL SELL: Sept., Oct., Nov., Dec., 1914; April, May, June, July, Aug., 1915, at thirty-five cents a copy; Jan., Feb., March, April, May, June, 1916; first six issues, 1918 at thirty cents a copy; all 1919; all 1920; all 1921 at twenty cents a copy; 1922 complete to date at fifteen cents a copy.—Address R. L. FARRINGTON, 525 Monroe St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

WILL BUY: Nov. 20th, Dec. 20, 1921; Mid-Feb., 1st and Mid-March, 1st and last April, 1922. Fifteen cents each. Must be in good condition.—Address WALTER M. EVANS, 269 McLeod St., Ottawa, Canada.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators; use fiction of almost any length; under 3,000 welcomed.

Camp-Fire Stations

Our Camp-Fire is extending its Stations all over the world. Any one belongs who wishes to. Any member desiring to meet those who are still hitting the trails may maintain a Station in his home or shop where wanderers may call and receive such hospitality as the Keeper wishes to offer. The only requirements are that the Station display the regular sign, provide a box for mail to be called for and keep the regular register book and maintain his Station in good repute. Otherwise Keepers run their Stations to suit themselves and are not responsible to this magazine or representative of it. List of Stations and further details are published in the Camp-Fire in the first issue of each month.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Missing Friends or Relatives

(*See Lost Trails*)

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for a long period is listed on the last page of the last issue of each month.

Addresses

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. (See footnote at bottom of page.) Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

1. The Sea Part 1 American Waters
BERIAH BROWN, 1624 Bigelow Ave., Olympia, Wash. Ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting, small-boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; fishing vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks. (*See next section.*)

2. The Sea Part 2 British Waters
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure.* Seamanship, navigation, old-time sailorizing, ocean-cruising, etc. Questions on the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire go to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown.

3. Islands and Coasts Part 1 Islands of Indian and Atlantic Oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure.* Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (*See next section*).

4. Islands Part 2 Haiti, Santo Domingo, Porto Rico and Virgin Group
CHARLES BELL EMERSON, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif. Languages, mining, minerals, fishing, sugar, fruit and tobacco production.

5. ★ New Zealand; and the South Sea Islands Part 1 Cook Islands, Samoa
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Travel, history, customs; adventure, exploring, sport. (*Postage 8 cents.*)

6. South Sea Islands Part 2
CHARLES BROWN, JR., 213 E St., San Rafael, Calif. French Oceania (Tahiti, the Society, Paumoto, Marquesas); islands of Western Pacific (Solomons, New Hebrides, Fiji, Tonga); of Central Pacific (Guam, Ladrone, Pelew, Caroline, Marshall, Gilbert, Ellice); of the Detached (Wallis, Penrhyn, Danger, Easter, Rotuma, Futuna, Pitcairn), Inhabitants, history, travel, sports, equipment, climate living conditions, commerce, pearling, vanilla and coconut culture.

7. ★ Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, Sydney Press Club, 51 Elizabeth St., Sydney, Australia. Customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, history. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

8. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
FAY-COOPER COLE, Ph. D., Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions.

9. ★ New Guinea
L. P. B. ARMIT, Port Moresby, Territory of Papua, *via* Sydney, Australia. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions. Questions regarding the measures or policy of the Government or proceedings of Government officers not answered. (*Postage 6 cents.*)

10. Philippine Islands
BUCK CONNOR, P. O. Box 202, Hollywood, Calif. History, inhabitants, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, commerce.

11. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 714 Marquette Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

12. Japan
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Me. Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

13. Asia, Southern
CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, 1315 Josephine St., New Orleans, La. Arabia, Persia, India, Tibet, Burma, western China, Borneo. Hunting, exploring, traveling, customs.

★ *(Enclose addressed envelop with 5 cents—in Mr. Beadle's case 12 cents—in stamps NOT attached)*

14. Africa Part 1 Sierra Leone to Old Calabar, West Africa, Southern and Northern Nigeria
ROBERT SIMPSON, care *Adventure*. Labor, trade, expenses, outfitting, living conditions, tribal customs, transportation.

15. ★ Africa Part 2 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East, Uganda and the Upper Congo
CHARLES BEADLE, Ile de Lerne, par Vannes, Morbihan, Brittany, France. Geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, adventure and sport. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

16. Africa Part 3 Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand
CAPTAIN F. J. FRANKLIN, care Adventurers' Club of Chicago, 40 South Clark St., Chicago, Ill. Climate, shooting and fishing, imports and exports; health resorts, minerals, direct shipping routes from U. S., living conditions, travel, opportunities for employment. Free booklets on: Orange-growing, apple-growing, sugar-growing, maize-growing; viticulture; sheep and fruit ranching.

17. ✠ Africa Part 4 Portuguese East
R. G. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

18. Africa Part 5 Morocco
GEORGE E. HOLT, care *Adventure*. Travel, tribes, customs, history, topography, trade.

19. Africa Part 6 Tripoli
CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, 1315 Josephine Street, New Orleans, La. Including the Sahara Tuaregs and caravan routes. Traveling, exploring, customs, caravan trade.

20. Africa Part 7 Egypt and Barbary States
J. L. BINDA, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York. Egypt and Sudan, Tunis, Algeria. Travel, history, ancient and modern; monuments, languages, races, customs, commerce.

21. Turkey and Asia Minor
J. L. BINDA, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York. Travel, history, geography, races, languages, customs, trade opportunities.

22. Balkans, except Albania
J. L. BINDA, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York. Greece, Jugo-Slavia, Bulgaria, Roumania. Travel, history, topography, languages, customs, trade opportunities.

23. Albania
ROBERT S. TOWNSEND, 1447 Irving St. N. W., Washington, D. C. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

24. Scandinavia
ROBERT S. TOWNSEND, 1447 Irving St. N. W., Washington, D. C. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

25. Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Poland
FRED F. FLEISCHER, Room 308, 26 Broadway, New York. History, politics, customs, languages, trade opportunities, travel, sports, outdoor life.

26. South America Part 1 Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure*. Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

27. South America Part 2 Venezuela, the Guianas, Brazil, Uruguay Paraguay and Argentina
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure*. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, inhabitants, languages, hunting and fishing.

28. Central America
CHARLES BELL EMERSON, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif. Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, languages, game, conditions, minerals, trading.

29. Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Border States of old Mexico—Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, inhabitants, hunting; history, industries.

30. Mexico Part 2 Southern; and Lower California
C. R. MAHAFFEY, Box 182, Salinas, Calif. Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, inhabitants, business and general conditions.

31. ✠ Canada Part 1 Height of Land and Northern Quebec
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Also Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. Ry.); southeastern Ungava and Keewatin. Sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber, customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

32. ✠ Canada Part 2 Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario
HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., Canada. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping, aviation. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

33. ✠ Canada Part 3 Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario
GEORGE L. CATTON, 94 Metcalfe St., Woodstock, Ont., Canada. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

34. Canada Part 4 Hunters Island and English River District
T. F. PHILLIPS, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn. Fishing, camping, hunting, trapping, canoeing, climate, topography, travel.

35. Canada Part 5 Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta
ED. L. CARSON, Monroe, Wash. Including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

36. ✠ Canada Part 6 Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and Northern Keewatin
REECE H. HAGUE, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

37. ✠ Canada Part 7 New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Southeastern Quebec
JAS. F. B. BELFORD, Codrington, Ont., Canada. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper industry, water-power. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

38. Alaska
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

39. Baffinland and Greenland
VICTOR SHAW, 161 West 11th Ave., Columbus, O. Hunting, expeditions, dog-team work, whaling, geology, ethnology (Eskimo).

40. Western U. S. Part 1 Calif., Ore., Wash., Nev., Utah and Ariz.
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

41. Western U. S. Part 2 Colo. and Wyo.
FRANK MIDDLETON, 705 So. 1st St., Laramie, Wyo. Geography, agriculture, stock-raising, mining, hunting, fishing, trapping, camping and outdoor life in general.

42. Western U. S. Part 3 Mont. and the Northern Rocky Mountains
CHESTER C. DAVIS, Helena, Mont. Agriculture, mining, northwestern oil-fields, hunting, fishing, camping, automobile tours, guides, early history.

43. Western U. S. Part 4 Idaho and Surrounding Country
OTTO M. JONES, Warden, Bureau of Fish and Game, Boise, Idaho. Camping, shooting, fishing, equipment, information on expeditions, outdoor photography, history and inhabitants.

44. Western U. S. Part 5 Tex. and Okla.
J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Minerals, agriculture, travel, topography, climate, hunting, history, industries.

45. Middle Western U. S. Part 1 The Dakotas, Neb., Ia., Kan.
JOSEPH MILLS HANSON (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure*. Hunting, fishing, travel. Especially, early history of Missouri Valley.

46. Middle Western U. S. Part 2 Mo. and Ark.
JOHN B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Also the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big-timber sections.

47. Middle Western U. S. Part 3 Ind., Ill., Mich., Wis., Minn. and Lake Michigan
J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Fishing, clamming, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, early history, legends.

48. Middle Western U. S. Part 4 Mississippi River
GEO. A. ZERR, Vine and Hill Sts., Crafton P. O., Ingram, Pa. Routes, connections, itineraries; all phases of river steamer and power-boat travel; history and idiosyncrasies of the river and its tributaries. Questions regarding methods of working one's way should be addressed to Mr. Spears. (*See next section.*)

49. Eastern U. S. Part 1 Miss., O., Tenn., Michigan and Hudson Valleys, Great Lakes, Adirondacks
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Automobile, motor-cycle, bicycle and pedestrian touring; shanty-boating, river-tripping; outfit suggestions, including those for the transcontinental trails; game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs.

✠ (*Enclose addressed envelop with 3 cents in stamps NOT attached*)

50. Eastern U. S. Part 2 Motor-Boat and Canoe Cruising on Delaware and Chesapeake Bays and Tributary Rivers

HOWARD A. SHANNON, *Alexandria Gazette*, Alexandria, Va. Motor-boat equipment and management. Oystering, crabbing, eeling, black bass, pike, sea-trout, croakers; general fishing in tidal waters. Trapping and trucking on Chesapeake Bay. Water fowl and upland game in Maryland and Virginia. Early history of Delaware, Virginia, and Maryland.

51. Eastern U. S. Part 3 Tenn., Ala., Miss., N. and S. C., Fla. and Ga.

HAPSBURG LIEBE, Orlando, Fla. Except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

52. Eastern U. S. Part 4 Maine

DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 70 Main Street, Bangor, Me. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

RADIO

DONALD MCNICOL, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J. Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.

MINING and PROSPECTING

VICTOR SHAW, 161 West 11th Ave., Columbus, O. Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining, mining methods or practise; where and how to prospect, how to outfit; how to make the mine after it is located; how to work it and how to sell it; general geology necessary for miner or prospector, including the precious and base metals and economic minerals such as pitch-blende or uranium, gypsum, mica, cryolite, etc. Questions regarding investment or the merits of any particular company are excluded.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.

MOUNTAINS and MOUNTAINEERING

Especially of New England. ARTHUR BENT, Appalachian Mountain Club, 1050 Tremont Bldg., Boston, Mass.

OLD SONGS THAT MEN HAVE SUNG

ROBERT FROTHINGHAM, 745 Riverside Drive, New York City. A department for collecting hitherto unpublished specimens and for answering questions concerning all songs of the out-of-doors that have had sufficient virility to outlast their immediate day; chanteys, "forebitters," ballads —songs of outdoor men—sailors, lumberjacks, soldiers, cowboys, pioneers, rivermen, canal-men, men of the Great Lakes, voyageurs, railroad men, miners, hoboes, plantation hands, etc.

WEAPONS, PAST and PRESENT

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district.)

A.—All Shotguns, including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers, including foreign and American makes. DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

C.—Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800. Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. LEWIS APPLETON BARKER, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

STANDING INFORMATION

For information on trade in any part of the world, address J. L. BINDA, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York.

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines, Porto Rico, and customs receiverships in Santo Domingo and Haiti, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dept. of the Interior, Wash, D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union may be called upon for general information relating to Latin-American matters or for specific data. Address L. S. ROWE, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For R. C. M. P., Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Com., Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dept. of Com., Wash., D. C.

United States Revolver Ass'n. W. A. MORRALL, Sec'y-Treas., Hotel Virginia, Columbus, O.

All inquiries for information regarding the national parks, how to get there and what to do when you get there, should be addressed to the National Park Service, Washington, D. C.

Notes on Grub-Packing

A LITTLE addenda to Brother Middleton's interesting article on the camper's equipment and foodstuffs, which appeared in the Aug. 10th, 1922, issue. The writer's experience has covered thirty years and many fields on this continent. Much thanks for your letter, Brother Solomons!

Berkeley, Calif.

The writer has carried butter successfully in both the North and West. The former may seem not to count, but in the mountains and plains of the West the temperatures do indeed challenge the ingenuity of the packer in his efforts to preserve perishables, of which butter is undoubtedly one. The trick is simply to keep it cool and avoid dissolving the salt from the surface of the rolls, squares or chunks of butter.

Wrap the butter in a little extra butter cloth between the layers of which is sprinkled pulverized rock salt (coarse granular salt) and cover with burlap kept moist. In quite hot weather moisten and hang up at night and, still moist, keep out of the sun and out of contact with any warm object in the pack. Butter thus protected from melting and from loss of the salt on its surface will not become rancid for many weeks.

However, pickled butter in tins may be obtained in the larger cities, and this quite satisfactorily solves the butter question. You carry tin and water, but you save the trouble of fussing with the butter.

Peanut butter is not a substitute for butter, excellent food though it is. It is largely a proteid while butter is a pure carbohydrate. Moreover a good many people either dislike it or are indifferent to it, while nearly every outdoor man likes butter and eats his bread, hot cakes, etc., with a great deal more zest when this popular "spread" is available to him.

Dried (dehydrated) vegetables are light, easily

carried, last indefinitely, are excellent for compounding with stews, mulligans, and the like, and constitute a prophylactic against digestive ills sometimes following a too concentrated food ration such as the campers are apt to carry. Dried fruit also is almost an essential. It is, of course, equally easy to transport.

One other point—this time on the side of equipment—the Dutch oven. This is a heavy utensil, hard to pack. Its importance, however, as a bread-maker usually has justified its inclusion in the equipment of the packer.

I would suggest, in passing, that there is no necessity, as Mr. Middleton seems to imply, in making a thin loaf. A dough may be prepared thick enough to rise to the full of the oven and stay risen—a regularly kneaded loaf, even though made (as it must be where a cabin is not available for making sour-dough bread) with baking-powder. Then you have a loaf that goes some distance with a hungry group, carrying them over quite easily to the next evening's camp.

But why use a Dutch oven (which is a heavy iron kettle with a heavy concave lid) when you can obtain now at any large camping-outfit store a "reflecting oven" that folds up, weighs much less than the oven and packs as readily as a wide short board, whose shape it is exactly? The reflecting oven bakes bread, biscuits, muffins, cake, pie, meat—anything at all that an oven at home will bake, and does it in plain sight.

The thing sets up with two vertical ends and two horizontal sides which slope at about forty-five degrees to the cooking-fire, the lower rising, the upper declining toward the three or four inch back wall of the oven. There is a shelf of wire jutting out between these inclined bottom and top surfaces on which the pan of bread or cake rests. The heat of the fire plays directly on the pan and is also deflected upon it top and bottom from the inclined tin surfaces. You don't have to keep the latter bright, although its efficiency is probably higher when you do.

Reflecting ovens were harder to obtain twenty-five years ago than they are now. Every one who goes afield depending on his own cooking should be provided with one. They are in no sense experimental.—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS.

The full statement of the sections, as given in this issue, is printed only in alternate issues.

Reichsbank Marks

GOING down!

Question:—"Am thanking you for any information concerning present opinions of Reichsbank marks.

Also any information concerning Luger automatic pistols—calibers, range, penetration; the attachable shoulder stock, and where the ones with the longest possible barrels could be procured—would be much appreciated."—C. V. RIDGELY, Flagstaff, Ariz.

Answer, by Mr. Fleischer:—From your letter I note that you wish information concerning present "opinions" of Reichsbank marks. I am glad you do not ask my personal opinion. The best I can do is to repeat what I have gathered from reliable sources concerning the general economic outlook in Germany, which, of course, has a lot to do with the rise and fall of the mark.

In the pre-war days the Reichsbank (the Bank of the German Empire) issued paper currency, which was then backed by a substantial gold reserve as well as by a favorable trade balance. German money and securities were then gilt-edged.

Today, especially at the date of this writing (Aug. 21, 1922) the situation is quite different. Due to the reparation payments made or to be made, due to the lack of a gold reserve and many other reasons too numerous to be cited, German money is practically valueless and even optimists can not see a change for betterment within reasonable time.

If you take into consideration the fact that Germany under the provisions of the Versailles Treaty must pay billions of dollars either in German gold marks or strong currency of foreign countries, that she must purchase commodities for her industries at an exchange very unfavorable to her and that most of her factories are working for the benefit of the Allies in an effort to make good the ravages of war, you will come to your own conclusion that it is impossible for the present generation to bring back the mark to her pre-war value.

If my guess is right that you are contemplating investing in either marks or securities, I would like to tell you a yarn "Bat" Ryan, who was at one time connected with the curb market, used to broadcast.

He was once approached to buy certain mining-stock. After examining the beautifully engraved stock certificates, he addressed the solicitor as follows:

"Mr. Miller, there are ten reasons why I won't buy this stock. First of all, it isn't worth the paper it is printed on——"

Here Mr. Miller interrupted—

"Never mind the other nine reasons."

Sorry, but I can not advise you with reference to Luger automatics. Look up the magazine, under "Weapons, Past and Present" for Mr. Wiggins' address. Write to him.

If you want further information on anything in my line, come again.

Canada's Husky-Dog Market

EVEN trappers with years of experience sometimes find it hard to locate:

Question:—"Would you kindly oblige me by giving me the information if you have it as to where I could buy a four-dog team of malemiuts; or if they are not obtainable huskies will do as I am a trapper and have tried for years to get this special kind of dogs but have not got any as yet. I have tried Cochran and Cobalt, but there are none there. Any information you could give will be greatly appreciated."—WM. SMITH, Marsey Bay, Ont., Can.

Answer, by Mr. Hague:—I would advise writing to the Hudson's Bay Company, Winnipeg, for husky dogs. Procured this way you could get good dogs, and the cost would probably be $250 for four dogs.

There are no malemiuts in this part of the country, as they are common to Alaska, but I think you will find the husky more satisfactory. Huskies are

generally used by trappers in this part of Canada, teams usually running from five to eight dogs.

The malemiut is a smaller dog than the husky, and in Alaska they drive a large number in a team, sometimes as many as twenty dogs. The husky is larger and is a good strong work dog.

Over a good trail the husky team can pull about 100 lbs. a dog or more; but it depends largely on the condition of the country over which you are traveling.

The most satisfactory rig for trapping seems to be the carriole, and you should have no difficulty in getting a model or procuring one from the Hudson's Bay Company.

You might also communicate with Walter Goyne, The Pas, for information regarding the relative merits of huskies and malemiuts. Mr. Goyne is an experienced dog racer, having won many races in Alaska, and the Hudson Bay Dog Derby here in 1919.

The Varangian Guards

"VARANGIAN," the dictionary says, comes from the Icelandic *Væringi*, which in turn is derived from the word *vārar*, meaning "troth." When you find it in use among the Byzantines of the ninth century you get a better idea of what far-wanderers the Norsemen were:

Question:—"I am not sure that this question should go to you, but if it does not belong in your territory please tell me whom to send it to.

Who were the Varangian Guards?

Did they serve the Byzantine Empire?

Of what nationality were they?

Were they the king's guard, or were they a noted regiment?

To what end did they come?

Can you tell me of some books on the Byzantine Empire and the Varangian Guards?"—CHAS. SHEPHERD, Los Angeles, Calif.

Answer, by Mr. Binda:—The Varangian Guards were the mercenary troops employed by the Byzantine emperors from the ninth to the twelth century.

They were the descendants of the old Norse invaders of Russia and of the Normans who invaded Britain and also settled in the northern part of France, now known as Normandy. At first these corps were composed of Northmen and Goths from Sweden and Norway, but later many members came from the Teutonic countries and England.

The Varangians were the emperor's fighting troops and usually did all the severe fighting. This famous unit came to an end by defeat and dispersion with the fall of the Byzantine Empire in the twelfth century. As to a book I would recommend Edward Foord's "The Byzantine Empire."

The Art of Prospecting

IT IS learned in all its branches in the School of Experience with a laboratory equipment consisting of a brace of legs, eyes to an equal number, ears to match and a light-running tongue shaped like a question mark. Book-l'arnin', as Brother Carson tells it, availeth not:

Question:—"I would like to get some information about mining and prospecting for gold. Something a fellow can understand who doesn't know anything much about it. If you can recommend any books or give any information along that line I would like to get it.

I have looked through different books, and all I can find is technical and chemical terms I can not understand. What I want is something telling how to pan or cradle the dirt or sand, or how to wash for gold, and how to tell the color when you see it, or anything along this line. Would be very grateful for information.

Enclosing a stamped, addressed envelop for reply."—WILLIAM F. NAATZ, Oneonta, N. Y.

Answer, by Mr. Carson:—If there is a book that tells any one how to prospect that is worth a whoop in —— I never ran across it. Furthermore I do not believe such a book could be written. Somewhere, I think it was in a sort of general-knowledge compendium, I ran on to a description of how prospectors tried out an indication. It gave the whole proceeding even to "agitate the pan with a rotary motion," a phrase that still sticks to me. In order to test out a theory I asked a friend of mine to take the dish-pan and go through the operation as described in order that I might see just how closely he would come to the real thing. He did so carefully and intelligently, and the result convinced me that it was something like flipping flap-jacks; there was no description for it, it was just "done."

I have never been even a prospector in the true sense of the term; but I have done a little panning for fun and even for investigation and wish to state right here that I believe all the books ever published on the subject will not tell a man as much in a year as he can learn in a day by walking along a creek where actual panning or sluicing is going on. In Klondike days men who had never seen a gold-pan came up there and left as little dust in the tailings as men who had been at it for years. Men who knew nothing of gold or its habitat made big stakes while experts went broke.

What's the answer? A man needs just as much technical knowledge to prospect as he does to dig spuds. Looks like it anyhow because if the spuds are there he will get them out of the ground somehow, and his skill will increase as he labors. This applies to a gold claim.

Experience will assist a man in "spotting" an old creek-bed or water-course, but intelligent observation will also do this. The same applies to "likely-looking" sand on a river-bar or in a creek-bed.

Having found this, almost any one could dope out some method of washing out the dirt by "rotary motion"—or sloshing it around; take your choice—and by practise would gradually become more skilful and learn the motions which gave the best results. The coarse gravel is scraped off by hand till nothing remains but the fine sand and its content. A small microscope or magnifying-glass will reveal what might be missed by the naked eye, and the prospect is either worth another panning or otherwise.

The use of quicksilver can be learned from any of the hundred experienced men you would meet on an expedition of this kind, and a five-minute demonstration would tell you all you could learn in a book in a week; besides which, when you had seen it done you would *know* the process. After reading about it you could guess or imagine.

Your cradle proposition is simply panning on a large scale while your sluicing is still more extensive with a current of water doing the "rotary-motion" act. I like that cussed phrase. It sounds real technical, much more so than "sloshing around."

How to tell when you have the real thing? A tenderfoot came into a road-house on the Dawson trail one evening, and, approaching an old-timer, said:

"I wish you would examine some stuff I have here. I think it is gold, but I am not sure."

"It isn't," returned the sourdough without turning his head.

"But, how can you tell when you have never seen it?"

"Don't have to see it. You're in doubt about it, and that is enough."

I believe nine-tenths of the experienced men will bear me out in the rather broad statement that there is no doubt about the real thing. Almost invariably gold is recognized at the first glance. In other words, if there is any doubt about it you have not struck the real thing.

I asked a prospector, after trying this out several times to my own satisfaction, if he could give any explanation as to why even a chechako could tell "good stuff" at a glance. His reply was:

"Aw, ——! How does a man know when he is sleepy?"

Will some technical sharp undertake to explain or describe the exact symptoms of sleepiness? Now were it possible to discover some one who had never been sleepy, how would he go at it to make him understand just what the symptoms and sensations were?

I may raise a storm of protest when I make the following assertion but I still will believe I am right.

Gold is found wherever it is regardless of indications, and you will know it when you see it.

Note from an "A. A." Man

CONSIDERING the size of his territory and consequently of his mail, it's amazing how seldom "Big Jim" Harriman has to revise his statements. In fact I recall only one other instance, and that was an inconsequential one:

Los Angeles, Calif.

In my reply to Harry J. Mason in "Ask Adventure" of September 30, I made two errors which have been called to my attention. The time of the Hopi snake dance varies according to the moon.

The usual time is in the latter part of August, though it has been known to occur in the first days of September. The date is not fixed until the watching priests see that the shadow cast by a rock and the moon, falls exactly into a certain rock crevice.

The origin of this dance is said by old Hopis to have been the action of the children when an unusually long dry season had parched things more than usual. These children, they claim, talked it over and decided to start something. So while their elders danced and prayed and chanted, they went out and caught snakes, any kind.

With these they danced the first snake dance, and a heavy rain fell immediately afterward. The rain convinced the priests that the act of the children had pleased the gods, so they adopted this dance as their rainmaking dance.

My second error was in saying only mature men danced. This is as I had it from others, having never witnessed the rite. Now comes my kindly correctionist, who tells me he has seen boys in it.

Also he says no one danced until played out. A friend of mine claims that he saw three fall exhausted in one dance. Which may have been due to an excessive number of snakes, as the dancers go around four times with each snake. Anyhow they dance, hold snakes, get bitten and vomit terribly afterward. No cameras allowed there now during dance.—E. E. HARRIMAN.

If you want an answer, read the rules.

Homesteading in New Zealand

UNLESS you fought for her in the World War, she has no lands to give you:

Question:—"Kindly answer the following questions in regard to New Zealand:

1. What are government's requirements in the case of new settlers?
2. What is land worth per acre?
3. To what crops is soil particularly adapted?
4. Do the people depend upon European markets entirely for export trade?
5. Does New Zealand invite the man of ordinary means or the capitalist?
6. Are discriminations made against citizens of other countries; *i. e.*, North, Central or South Americans?
7. Are railroad facilities adequate to handle commerce of country to ports?
8. Am contemplating making a trip there with a view to settling on a farm, and I would greatly appreciate any further data which you can conveniently furnish and which you think would be of assistance to me."— T. W. BRADDY, Balboa, C. Z.

Answer, by Mr. Mills:—1. It is rather difficult at the present juncture for any stranger within our gates to get amongst the settlers, as all the available land has been earmarked for the returned soldiers, a legion of whom desire to go upon the land, and are being assisted to do so by the government.

2. All the way from $100 to $500 per acre, according to whether you want to graze, to dairy, or to agriculture.

3. Having a temperate climate, we grow everything needful for cattle, from millet to maize—and of course, wheat, barley, oats, and other staples.

4. England takes practically all the butter, cheese, wool and frozen meats that we turn out—and for the year just closed our total exports were valued at $172,000,000, which is not bad going for a country that has only one and one-half million men, women, and children within its confines.

5. Certainly—there are excellent openings for such in this young and comparatively new country, which is only beginning to develop itself.

6. No. So long as a man has a good reputation, is healthy, and is not a rebel against law and order or a Bochie, he is welcomed.

7. Quite. New Zealand is well railroaded, run by the state, and primarily for the development of settlement, so that all railroads lead to our seaports.

8. You will need to have some thousands by you to get into farm life. I enclose some data that may help you.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

CLOVER LEAF CLUB. Please let me hear from you. Mother not very well. Brother is better and may join me soon.—Address W. G., care of *Adventure.*

NEWMAN, ALBERT E. Last heard of was in Washington working as fireman on railroad. Age thirty-five years. Any information will be appreciated.—Address MRS. E. G. KITCHEN, care of Red Cross Cottage, Hyannis Port, Mass.

DEMPSEY, RAY. Soda Squirt. Born Louisville, Ky. Age twenty-five. Left Chicago in 1915. Believed to have joined navy and located in New Orleans during the war. Has small scar on back of head and possible slanting scar across top of nose; also tattoo on lower arm. Any information will be appreciated by his brother.—Address JACK DEMPSEY, 1851 Elston Ave., Chicago, Ill.

HEATON, MAURICE. I have written to you a number of times but I have received no answer. Where are you now? I am very sorry for what happened a few months ago. Forgive me. Write at once.—Address LELAND TINKER, 527 Campbell Ave., Roanoke, Va.

SAMMET, JACOB. Left home April, 1922. Age eighteen, brown hair, blue eyes, five feet six inches, weight 130 pounds. Wore a blue serge suit, striped shirt and black shoes and gray cap. Had a tattoo of an anchor and a spreading eagle with initials U. S. N. on the right arm. On the left arm a blue bird with spreading wings with his own initials J. J. S. Any information will be appreciated.—Address JOHN F. SAMMET, 532 East 83rd St., N. Y. C.

O'BRIEN, JOHN. Left home Feb. 22, 1922, on a business trip to Boston. Age thirty-three, blue eyes, sandy hair and sallow complexion. Employed as sugar sampler. Any information will be appreciated by his mother.—Address MRS. A. O'BRIEN, 93 St. Johns Place, Brooklyn, N. Y.

KEIM, ALBERT. Last heard of in Canada. Any news of his present address will be greatly appreciated. —Address LOUIS KEIM, A. F. in G., American Post-office No. 927, Coblenz, Germany.

ACRES, BERT. Formerly of Ketchikan, Alaska. Has wife named Ethel and two children, boy and girl. Left Alaska in 1918 for Seattle, Wash. May be in Seattle, Portland or Chicago. Dark complexion, five feet six inches. Any information will be appreciated.—Address A. MCCALL, care of North Pacific Sea Products Co., 2105 L. E. Smith Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

KERKLING, HERBERT E. Left San Diego, Calif., for Mexico May, 1922. Please write to your father.—Address C. D. Kerkling, 4626 Arizona St., San Diego, Calif.

MAGEE, ALFRED H. ("Red.") Resident of Pittsburg, Pa. Last heard of in Pasadena, Calif., 1917. Please write.—Address L. J. THOE, Devil's Lake, North Dakota.

MACDONALD, JAMES F. Last seen in Pittsburgh, Pa. June 24, 1922. Large brown eyes, dark brown hair, height six feet, weight 170 pounds. Has a tattooed ship on right forearm. Is an automobile grinder by trade. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated. —Address MRS. VIVIAN G. MACDONALD, 1325 Taylor Ave., New Kensington, Pa.

LAYTON, CLYDE. Last heard of in 1920 was in Lacrosse, Washington. Any information will be appreciated.—Address POST-OFFICE BOX 491, Anaconda, Montana.

SCOTTS, CECIL. Last heard of was in Liverpool, England. Any information will be appreciated.—Address PVT. CLYDE MARKS, Hdg. Co. 30th Inf. Camp Lewis, Wash.

SJOBERG, ALEX. Swedish. Age thirty-five. Last heard from in Spring of 1919, then employed in lumber camp at Elk River, Idaho. Camp A & B please communicate with sister.—Address MRS. VICTORIA CROSBY, 217 N. Chelsea Ave., Atlantic City, N. J.

SMIGOSKI, JOHN M. Age eighteen, about five feet six inches, weight about 130 pounds, gray eyes, light brown hair. Has large scar back of left ear; slightly bow-legged. Slow in speech. Wore dark blue suit with light stripe. Dark brown golf cap, dark brown shoes. Carried a slip sweater, black and yellow all over, also vest pocket camera. Mother has forgiven you and is anxious to hear from you. Please write or come.—Address Sgt. WM. S. SMIGOSKI, Fort Sheridan, Ill.

FAUSLER, J. P. (Clarence.) Am camping on your trail. With best regards. Please write to TEXAS RANGER.

FOSTER, DONALD A. Please write to mother. She is heartbroken.—Address MRS. LORA JACKSON, BOX 51, Lake Stevens, Wash.

DOW, EDMUND F. Resident of Richmond County, Maine. Last heard of at Delano, Kern County, Calif., in 1890. Any information will be appreciated by his aunt. —Address MARGARET LITTLE, BOX 145, Highland Valley, via Escondido, Calif.

MC MANUS, RODERICK P. Left home in June, 1917. Was on the U. S. S. *Lawrence* in 1917. Age twenty-two years. Five feet seven inches tall, black hair, blue eyes. Any information will be appreciated by his mother. —Address MRS. HELEN MCMANUS, 1102 30th St., Oakland, Calif.

BARNARD, ELLA. Daughter of Geo. A. Barnard. Former resident of Everett St., Charlestown, Mass. New York City last known address. Any information will be appreciated.—Address L. T., 448, care of *Adventure.*

HARDING, SAMUEL MERTON. Late of Cavite, P. I. Was last seen on Calle Tres Martires in April, 1922. Please write your old pal BILLY, same old address.

ESTES, BILL ADAMS. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated—Address W. E. Davis, care of JOHN STEWART, LTD., Castlereigh St., near Park Ave., Sydney, Australia.

BUSH, HENRY. Native of Bristol, England. Discharged from U. S. Cavalry at Ft. Washakie, Wyoming, March 20, 1902. Age about 45. Any information will be appreciated.—Address W. TROTT, Roubeau, Sask., Can.

MADSEN, LOUIS. The papers from Denmark are here to be signed. Please advise me where I can send them for you to sign. If you do not wish to write me, please write.—Address W. N. HOSTROP, Citizens Bank.

SPAULDING, JOSEPH C. Have valuable information for you. Please write.—Address AL. TAYLOR, 417½ W. 8th St., Los Angeles, Calif.

GARCIA, JULIAN (Joe), James Wing, Guy Hunter. Formerly of 2nd Div. Camp Travis, Texas. Your old pal would like to hear from you.—Address ROY MILLER, Route 6, Mountain Grove, Mo.

TAYLOR, MILTON JAMES. Resident of Middletown and New Haven, Conn. Last heard of in 1911, was in Los Angeles, Calif. About fifty-five years old, five feet 8 inches, sturdy build, square jaw, deep cleft chin, saber cut down left cheek, right thumb gone at first joint, tips of all four fingers off right hand. Wore dark clothes, dark sombrero. In secret service in 1895-1900-1-or 2. Oil business in 1910-11, traveling between Los Angeles, San Antonio and Mexico City. Any information will be appreciated.—Address HOMER H. BROWN, Travellers Ins. Co., Hartford, Conn.

THE following have been inquired for in either the November 20th or December 10th issues of Adventure. They can get the name of the inquirer from this magazine.

BAILEY, JACK W.; Bossman, Arthur; Bradley, George Shifler or Joseph Lake; Cannon, Lewis Marion; Cook, "Mano"; Cook, R. M.; Davis, Aron; Farss, Ellis, G.; Foster, H. B. (Hal); Franklin, B. G. (Guy); Gregoire, Frank; Hartman, G.; Howard, George; Huffman, Carl; Jensen, Victor; Johnson, Nellie; Kahl, Harry; Kennedy, Norman; Lee; Malcom, Peter; McDevitt, Hugh; Middaugh, Robert Lee; Muller, Robert F.; Payne, Alfred; Philpott, Jack; Pilsbury, Mary; Reed, Mrs. M. A.; Reiner, Harold; Sargent, John W.; Seril, Frank; Shahane, T. C.; Shaklee, George H.; Snyder, "Dutch"; Stotts, Cecil, Clarence and Charley; Styles, Virgil; Thomas, Luther; Vivian, Howard; Wall, Frank or any other member of 22nd Co. from 1898 to 1903; Williams, Earl; Williams, Rufus; Willet, Jas. S.; Wilson, Samuel William; Wray, Albert L. (sometimes called Gray).

MISCELLANEOUS—Jack write I know all. N. S. L.; Would like to hear from Sergeant of Co. K., infantry, who was in France with me, after the armistice was signed; U. S. S. *Truxtun's* Crew, 1911; James Kirby, W. T. Eugene Frye, Pete Crawford, or anyone who knew "Daddy" Lantz in 1911-12.

UNCLAIMED mail is held by Adventure for the following persons, who may obtain it by sending us present address and proof of identity.

ADDLEMAN, FRANK C.; Aldridge, F. T.; Bailey, Dick; Balensifer, Frank A. W.; Barrett, Raymond; Bertsch, Elizabeth; Beverley, C. S.; Blaicher, Chas. A.; Bonner, Major J. S.; Boes, Mrs.; Brown, Mrs. W. E.; Bryson, Clarence F.; Butterfield, M. E.; Buckley, Ray; Bryon, J.; Buckner; Carr, John; Carpenter, Capt. Robert S.; Center, Jack; "Chink"; Clark, Wilfred J.; Coles, Bobby; Corbett, Fred P.; Coleman, J. J.; Connor, A. M.; Cook, Eliott D.; Cook, Wm. N.; Corporal; Courtland, Victor; De Brissac, Ricardo; Dennis, F. C.; Dunn, Ed.; Edwards, Edgar; Erwin, Phil; Fisher, Sgt. R.; Ford, Harry; Franklin R.; Gale, Geo. A.; Garson, Ed.; Green, L. E.; Grimm, H. C.; Gunn, P. R.; Hailstorm, Chief; Harriss, Walter J.; Haskins, S. S.; Hauslet, G. F.; Hooker, Wm. F.; Hughes, Frank E.; Hunt, Daniel O'Connell; Jackson, R. R.; Kelly, C. H.; Kennedy, Paul I.; Kuckaby, Wm. Francis; Lange, Algot; Larisey, Jack; Lee, Wm. R.; Lekki, Michael; La Sonn, Fred W. Mrs.; Lovett, Harold S.; "Lonely Jack"; Mackintosh, D. T. A., McAdams, W. B.; McGovern, J. V.; McKee A. L.; McLane, A.; McNair, Henry S.; Manning, M. S.; Mendell, Marcus L.; May, E. C.; Mendelson, Aleck; Miller, Walter; Minor, John; Molitor, Joseph; Nelson, F. L.; Noll, Leslie D.; Nylander, Towne J.; O'Hara, Jack; Overton, C. H.; Parker, G. A.; Parrott, D. C.; Phillips, Buffington; Phillips, F. R.; Pigeon, A. M.; Posner, Geo. A.; Pulis, H. F.; Raines, Wm. L.; Rich, Bob; Rogan, Chas. B.; Rutherford, May (Mr.); Ryder, H. S.; St. Clair, Fred; Schafer, Geo.; Schmidt, Geo.; Sloan, Ch. A.; Simonds, Frank W.; Smith, C. O.; Starr, Ted.; Stewart, E. J.; Stevens, Albert A., Mrs.; Stocking, C. B.; Tripp, Ed.; Thaxter, Kenneth; Van Tyler, Chester; Varner, C. W.; Von Gelucke, Byron; Ward, Frank B.; Warren, C. Chester; Watkins, E. V.; Williams, Grover; Williams, Frank S.; Woeller, Erich.

MISCELLANEOUS—2480; WS-XV; C. C. C.; 398; J. C. H.; S-177284; 348; H. V. S.; T. W. S.;

PLEASE send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at address given do not reach you.—Address L. PATRICK GREENE, care of *Adventure*.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

JANUARY 10TH ISSUE, 1923

The next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

TREASON A Complete Novel — *Talbot Mundy*
Rebellion raises its head in India.

WITH SONG AND SWORD A Complete Novelette — *Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur*
An adventurous troubadour in the Middle Ages.

SAWDUST JOHNNY'S LIQUOR CURE — *E. S. Pladwell*
A rum shooter in the Southwest desert.

BLACK FLAG FROM BOSTON Pirate Tales from the Law—Quelch — *Arthur M. Harris*
Hundredweight of gold.

THE ARCTIC MAIL — *T. von Ziekursch*
On the route where even life's flame freezes.

BEYOND THE SUNSET A Three-Part Story Part II — *Arthur D. Howden Smith*
On into the land of the Sky Mountains.

THE RAIN-MAKER — *J. D. Newsom*
He was a beach-comber, drunkard and murderer, yet——

SELF-DEFENSE — *Edwin Hunt Hoover*
The search for an alibi.

THE BUILDING OF THE DAM — *I. M. Nichols*
A hatred stronger than fear.

WHEN BILL APPLEGATE MADE HIS WILL — *William Wells*
Surrounded by the Indians.

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A. S. Hinds Co.

Please write us

For Winter Comfort

Let us send you our newest and most attractive booklet—"Beauty Land"—which explains the merits of Hinds Honey and Almond Cream. Simply mail a brief request to the A. S. Hinds Co. at Portland, Maine, and this pretty booklet will come to you in a few days.

If you'll just try this wonderful cream for some of the purposes described we are very sure you will soon give it preference, because that is what so many other nice looking ladies have been doing all these years past.

It is the purity and refinement and gratifying effect of Hinds Honey and Almond Cream that have gained for it such a remarkable nation-wide and world-wide patronage. It is good for everybody in your home,—grown-ups and kiddies. Father and brother like it after shaving and to keep their hands smooth and good looking. It prevents as well as heals the chapping.

HINDS WEEK-END BOX

makes a very useful gift and costs only 50c. postpaid, or at your dealer's. It contains those essentials for the comfort and attractiveness of the face and hands. Trial size, Hinds Honey and Almond Cream, Cold and Disappearing Cream, Soap, Talc and Face Powder.

As you hike along the windy street
Facing the blast of icy sleet
Chapped faces, hands and ankles too
And windburned skin may trouble you.

Then pause a bit upon your way
And take the Cre-Maids' tip today,
Just use Hinds Honey and Almond Cream
And meet the weather with joy supreme.

Frostbites, chilblains and kindred ills
Hinds quickly comforts, heals and stills.
Chapping and windburn pass away,
Soft lovely skin just comes to stay.

When the winds are raw and the cold extreme
You need Hinds Honey and Almond Cream.

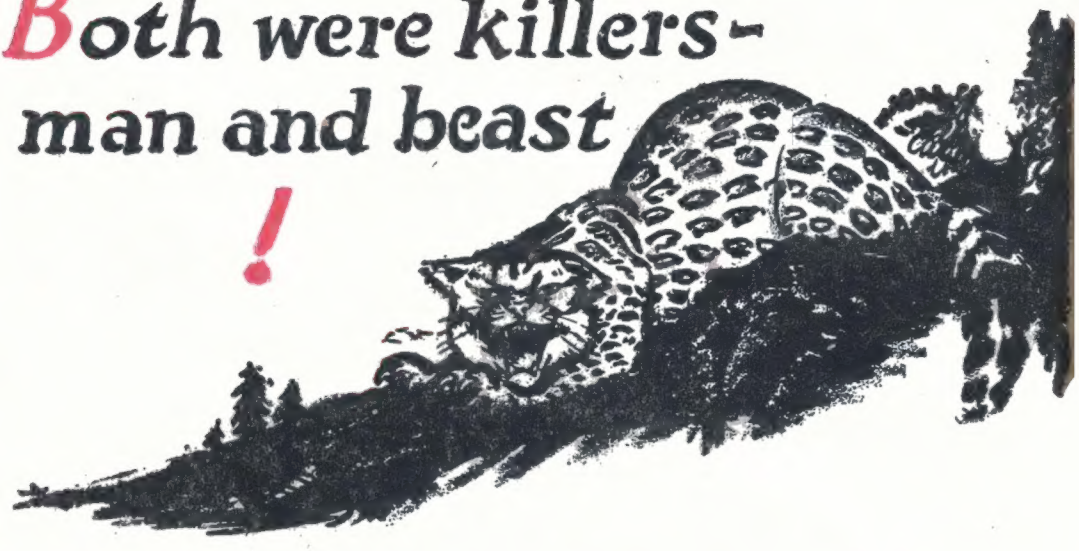
WONDERFUL BASE FOR FACE POWDER. Hinds Honey and Almond Cream is now used for this purpose with marvelous success. Moisten the skin slightly with the cream, let it nearly dry, then dust on the powder. It will adhere to perfection.

AS A MANICURING AID THIS CREAM softens the cuticle, prevents soreness and preserves the lustre of the nails.

All druggists and department stores sell Hinds Honey and Almond Cream. We will mail you a small sample for 2c or trial bottle for 6c. Ask your dealer for Hinds Superior Toilet Requisites, but if not obtainable, order of us. We send postpaid in the United States.

A. S. HINDS CO., Dept. 50, Portland, Maine

Both were killers—man and beast!



THEY hated each other—Landy, the hide hunter, and Pounce, the great cat—rivals in their relentless deer slaying. With a price on both their heads, they stalked each other thru the forest until one day both of them fell into the trap set by the Game Commission. What happens when these two killers meet?

This powerful story written by Edison Marshall will be published in *Everybody's Magazine* for December. Dana Burnet, Henry Francis Granger, Stanley Olmstead and F. St. Mars have also written short stories for this issue. If you want to buy yourself a real Christmas present, get a copy of the

December

Everybody's Magazine

FIRST IN FICTION :: ON EVERY NEWS-STAND